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## Cosmological motifs and themes in the Odyssey of Homer, with some antecedents in Minoan and Mycenaean iconography

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***Cosmological Motifs and Themes in the Odyssey  
of Homer, with some Antecedents in Minoan  
and Mycenaean Iconography.***

Submitted to the Department of Classical Studies of the Open University  
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*For Peter, and for my children*



## *Abstract*

It is argued that the symbolism of Homer's *Odyssey* preserves and perpetuates an inter-textual layer of metaphoric reference from which it is possible to reconstruct some of the religious and political ideology of the late Bronze Age Aegean. The epic literature, to some extent a guardian to the oral history of Minoan Crete and the Mycenaean sphere of influence, has been 'decoded' and placed in context by the use of stabilising *comparanda*. These are drawn from a universal myth, supplemented by Near Eastern ritual and belief. The ancient, worldwide imagery of the *axis mundi* and *omphalos*, 'navel of the earth', has provided an essential common denominator for the measurement and assessment of the epic discourse as well as surviving art and architecture.

The resultant evidence reveals that the poet held to cosmological and cosmogonic beliefs that envisaged a single creative source manifesting itself to man in the patterns of nature, including those of man's own form and intelligence. That source, the Absolute, holds heaven and earth in a linear bond which replicates into duality, then expands beyond into multiple forms. This vertical link is expressed most traditionally by a cosmic tree, pillar, mountain, staff or sceptre, and the earth's receptive point, the *omphalos*, appears as a stone, a cave, a throne or a bed. The 'navel point, centre of the world', is man's gateway to immortality. This important concept of a divine 'Centre' marking the point of access to the axial power provides not only considerable thematic material of Aegean architectural, glyptic and fresco design in the late second millennium BC, but also determines the course of Odysseus' Adventures, which are analysed anew in this study as stages in a spiritual journey along a solar course of departure and return, to and from that same transformative centre.

## *Acknowledgements*

*Any expertise that I have as an interpreter of symbols is owed to the skilled tutelage of the late Professor F. P. Pickering of the University of Reading, a mediaeval iconographer, who long ago taught me how to 'read the picture' and 'image the text'.*

*In more recent pursuit of the Odyssey's hero, I have had the pleasurable company and sterling advice of some loyal companions. Dr. Chris Emlyn-Jones of the Open University allowed me to attempt the reputedly impossible, and gave unfailing support and encouragement over the years. I am indebted to him for his deep knowledge of the classics and rigorous scholarship. In the field of archaeology Dr. Louise Steel has kept my feet firmly on the path of good practice and rescued me from many a wrong turning. To both I owe a debt of gratitude for their good humour, their confidence in me and their constructive criticism. Lastly I acknowledge that without my husband Peter at the helm of this ship, I would long since have foundered on some perilous rocks and never reached my goal.*

*Brecon, Powys. 2007.*

## *Approximate Chronology*

### *Bronze Age: Minoan Crete*

### *Mycenaean*

2000 BC	Protopalatial (MM I-II)	Middle Helladic
1700 BC	Neopalatial (MM IIIA-B)	
1600 BC	Late Minoan (LM IA)	Late Helladic I
1500 BC	Late Minoan (LM 1B)	Late Helladic II
1450 BC	Late Minoan (LM II)	Late Helladic IIB
1400 BC	Late Minoan (LM IIIA)	Late Helladic IIIA
1300 BC	Late Minoan (LM IIIB)	Late Helladic IIIB
1200 BC	Late Minoan (LM IIIC)	Late Helladic IIIC

## *Technicalities*

Homeric references in the body of the text are drawn from the *Odyssey*, unless otherwise indicated, e.g. (*Il.*) *Iliad*.

“Double quotation marks” show a reference from a named source, whereas ‘single quotes’ are intended to convey a synonym, an alternative terminology, or a putative reading.

Greek proper nouns generally conform to the spelling usage of the translator, Richmond Lattimore. Variations occur when quoting from other commentators.

Primary source editions consulted are from the Loeb classical Greek and Latin texts, unless otherwise indicated in footnotes and bibliography.

Footnote cross references to other sections of the thesis are given in **bold type**.

References containing analogies relating to the universal axis myth, in cultures other than (or as well as) the Aegean, Egyptian and Near Eastern, are introduced with the symbols **Cf. / Cfs.** or **cf. / cfs** in **bold type**.

***Birds***     ***lines 177-187***

Aristophanes *c.* 460-385 BC

**Pisthetaerus: What have you seen?**

**Epps: The clouds and the sky.**

**P.: Very well! is this not the pole of the birds then?**

**E.: How their pole?**

**P.: Or, if you like, their place. And since it turns and passes through the whole universe, it is called 'pole' (*polos*). If you build and fortify it, you will turn your pole into a city. In this way you will reign over mankind as you do over the grasshoppers and you will cause the gods to die of rabid hunger.**

**trans. Eugene O'Neill.**

***Section I      Methodology and Scholarship******Part 1: Methodology*** **2***Aims and Objectives* **2***Proposed Methodology* **3***Advantages and Disadvantages of the Methodology* **3***Resolving the Disadvantages* **4***In Defence and Explication of the Symbol* **5*****Part II: Scholarship*** **12 - 39**

## ***Aims and Objectives***

These are the major aims of the thesis, divided according to discipline, with the sections in which they are principally addressed:

### ***Homeric Contexts:***

- to place Homer as poet and theologian in the historical, social and cultural contexts of his time (II)
- to argue for some continuity between the late Bronze Age in the Aegean and the eighth century (II)
- to discuss some routes of transmission and influence between the Aegean, Egypt and Semitic lands (II)
- to propose a hidden symbolic discourse in the epics, and to discuss the role of secrecy in certain cults (II)
- to identify the methodological bases in the later allegorical tradition of Homer as an allegorist (II)

### ***Symbol, Myth and Cosmos:***

- to use the myth of the *axis mundi* to unravel cosmological themes and motifs in the *Odyssey* and (to a lesser extent) in the *Iliad* (III)
- to describe the course of the Adventures of Odysseus in terms of a cosmic voyage, thereby demonstrating the thematic unity structured into books 9-12 (IV)
- to confirm the universality and antiquity of the *axis mundi* myth, and its particular iconography (Appendix 1)
- to demonstrate some elaborations of axis mythology in separate East Mediterranean cultures (Appendix 2)

### ***Aegean Archaeology***

- to apply the same axis iconography to an interpretation of some cosmic aspects of Minoan and Mycenaean art and archaeology (V)
- and in this manner to indicate some historical antecedents to the cosmic themes of Homer.

### ***Proposed Methodology***

The forms and functions of a universal myth<sup>1</sup> will be employed to provide a basis of comparison between Bronze Age archaeology and the cosmological themes of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The study will progress from the contextualisation of Homer's cosmic symbolism, to a detailed interpretation of its motifs, themes, and a structured model, thence to an interpretation of similar Aegean cosmological features in architecture and decorative art.

The process will require identification of the leading features of the axis myth, close textual analysis of the *Odyssey*, and familiarity with the wide spectrum of Aegean archaeology. Since the study will compare media in literate and pre-literate cultures, and across many centuries, some comparisons and contrasts will be required in the search for compatible features. Careful distinctions are made between reference material relevant to the Homeric epics and, jointly or separately, the archaeological evidence, and that which is *not* chronologically appropriate, but is of general importance in establishing the antiquity, longevity and wide geographical distribution of the axis myth.

#### ***The advantages and disadvantages of the method are these:***

An advantage may prove *disadvantageous* if it introduces new complexities. Such is the case with comparanda arising from cross-cultural and inter-disciplinary studies such as the one envisaged here. No single instance can prove a case, and only a supportive network of parallels will truly confirm the individual comparison. Nevertheless possibilities may be explored as hypotheses.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendices 1 and 2.

***Advantages:***

- Interdisciplinary studies are now generally welcomed even where available evidence is ambiguous or contentious
- Methodologies can be studied and respected
- Even slender continuity gives hope of wider avenues of comparison
- Inter-cultural transmissions are an expanding field of scholarship <sup>2</sup>
- Connections between media (e.g. epic - glyptic) can be made on the basis of reiterated patterns, categories and subcategories (variants)
- Comparative studies in art, religion, anthropology and literature which undertake careful evaluation of major elements in their cultural, geographic and historical contexts are a valuable resource
- Symbolism, when understood and properly applied, is a powerful tool for understanding disparate cultures and chronologies.

***Disadvantages:***

- only limited continuity can be established between the pre-literate and literate worlds
- transmissions between societies are likely but uncertain
- the literature is largely without contemporary artistic parallel which may relate to it; the archaeological record is largely without text
- the use of comparanda can interrupt the flow of focused argument, whilst analogies are hard to authenticate
- 'Symbolist' interpretations are mistrusted by many for their ambiguity and circularity.

***Resolving the Disadvantages:***

A cosmic symbol which is widely considered a universal archetype will provide both a key and an analytical tool for a measured comparison of the epic in the first

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<sup>2</sup> Burkert, *Orientalizing* p. 5f., note 24. "Some 13<sup>th</sup>. century "Aegean Koiné"".



instance and its historical contexts in the second. Therefore this study begins with a discussion of the power, relevance and historical function of the symbolic process itself, which will prepare the way for considering Homer as a 'symbolising' poet.

The forms and applications of the axis myth are described in two Appendices at the end of the study.

### ***In Defence and Explication of the Symbol***

Peter Kingsley has presented a case for rethinking the vision of the earliest philosophers. It is his opinion that many "unspoken assumptions" based on the mainstream schools of Aristotle, Theophrastos and Plato require reassessment in the light of a separate, alternative Presocratic tradition which he considers closer to the original sources.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, he proposes "anchoring" the early fragments in their own historical context using specific tools: philology, contemporary literature, history, geography, myth, and religion. By this means, "unsolved problems solve each other".<sup>4</sup> Such a focused, contextual methodology is suited to the present writer's own inquiry.

The scholar's ideas propose a loss of continuity in the period between 'mythic' thinking and the 'scientific' reasonings of the first philosophers which would be paralleled by an equivalent loss of the traditional cosmologies. This suggests, by analogy, that if we have not to date discovered any substantial cosmology in Homer it is possibly because it is cast in a disguised or mythic mode less accessible to later 'reason'. Under this hypothesis, an alternative mode of unlocking the subtext would be required; and if logic is not appropriate, the symbol must become the key.



The symbol is a projection of perceived reality. But how does man define the real?

Three broad possibilities suggest themselves:

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<sup>3</sup> Kingsley (1995) pp. 2-6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

*One*, the only realities are in the natural world around us.

*Two*, there is perceived to be a real (phenomenological) world and an upper or differentiated world 'of the spirit', but they are separate.

*Three*, reality is a cloak to *supra*-reality, and visible forms are thought to express the intention and presence of the creator.

Opinion two implies a transcendent godhead, and opinion three, an imminent or a combined immanency / transcendency. It is this third viewpoint, most in accord with what is known of early animist<sup>5</sup> and totemic cults<sup>6</sup> and shamanism,<sup>7</sup> which requires a system of symbols to simplify, codify, organise and retrieve the metaphysical perspective. The visible form remains in evidence for its condensed, opaque and manipulable content and its mnemonic force, but the abstractions which it cloaks will emerge contextually via the comparison and contrast of one form with another.

It is proposed that those symbols having widest distribution and longevity are the 'purest' in the sense that they have been tested and refined by usage. These we know as archetypes or universal symbols,<sup>8</sup> and they will serve our purpose in the present context. The universal symbol of a bridge between the planes of sky, earth and underworld (*axis mundi*) and its companion, the central, sacred place where divinity is discovered or revealed (the *omphalos*) is of very great antiquity and world-wide distribution.<sup>9</sup>

If we deny the symbol its validity, we not only close the door on a hidden world, we also throw away the key. For, carefully used, symbols are invaluable tools which can carry the inquirer across the boundaries isolating literature from art, from history and from anthropology. If symbols arise from the cognitive processes of man (and

<sup>5</sup> *Enc. Brit.* I. 386. Belief in spiritual beings concerned with human affairs.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* X. 62. A mystic relationship between men and animals, plants.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* IX. 107. An ecstatic religion centred on the shaman, who can communicate with the world beyond. **Appendix 2, pp. 1-4.**

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* I. 489. Consistent primordial image, universal concept or situation; in Jungian terms, originating in pre-logical thought. Moon (1997).

<sup>9</sup> **Appendices 1, 2.** The reader may find it helpful to read these first.

particularly those which are deep in his subconscious mind, as some psychologists suggest), then they are the authentic expression of universal needs and imagination. And since thought is the source of all creativity, whether in speech, writing, artistic or ritual performance, the symbol transcends the disciplinary boundaries which are arbitrarily imposed by the organising mind. So we ask –

***What are the benefits and difficulties in working through symbols?***

An advantage of the symbol-system is its adaptability to other media, resting as it does on a visual outer form.

The difficulty of interpretation lies in the slippery nature of the symbol and its inevitable circularity. Accustomed as we are to the certitudes of science and our professional methodologies, we find the ‘open-ended’ nature of such material uncomfortably beyond the reach of rational evaluation. For a symbol is rarely fixed. Its function is to open the mind to possibilities, in which manner it serves as a channel to meditation and personal discovery.

This, and the multivalent or polysemous nature of the symbol would seem to suggest that there can be no reliable place for symbol analysis in the academic field. Certainly caution is required with what is potentially a foreign language to most of us, and yet we know that our own language frequently fails us when it comes to discussing abstractions. As Jon Whitman has observed, *à propos* of Plato’s struggles to define the human personality, “the more we try to clarify, to penetrate into the center of things, the more we leave our old language on the circumference”.<sup>10</sup> Man needs an independent set of referents in the manner of a dedicated language with which to discuss the metaphysical world, and only the symbol as ‘pure abstraction’ meets that criterion. Just as numbers and chemical symbols enable separate quantities and materials to be weighed and discussed in their interaction, so does the verbal or visual image with a

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<sup>10</sup> J. Whitman (1987) p. 29.

secondary value communicate with other imagery in a wider dialogue. Mathematicians know that numbers can serve as a route to metaphysical speculation; words and pictures share that function.

It is admitted that, as a methodology, there is a significant and dangerous risk of subjectivism in the unravelling of symbols. It is defensible in a scholarly context only on the basis that one is attempting to rediscover a stage in man's thinking when the written word had yet to achieve wide usage as an organisational tool, and at a time when man still had faith in signs, symbols, omens and prophecies. Several modern scholars have repeatedly emphasised the wide gulf which separates 'traditional' religious systems recognising patterns in nature and the importance of living in harmony with them, and those formulated by 'scientific' minds.<sup>11</sup>

***Some preliminary considerations: the axis***

Concerning our prime symbol for the investigation of Homeric astronomy, the *axis mundi* and its associated *omphalos*, it can be objected that too many natural objects conform to either the linear (*axis*) or round, receptive model (*omphalos*) for this to serve as a secure basis of comparison. Whilst recognising this as a methodological hazard, the argument can be turned on its head and supported from the reverse direction.

***One***, the above-below relationship cannot be other than linear, and the emanating and receiving points cannot be other than hollow or containing.

***Two***, since the prime pattern in human life (and the source of human self-identity) is that of the mammalian genitalia, all life and its perpetuation may be conditioned by basic anatomical models.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the human body pattern provides the concept of navel-centre, where the navel as the body's 'point of life' relates that notion to the sacred and regenerative Centre of a higher order.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The proponents of a 'Perennial Philosophy', especially Guénon and Coomaraswamy. I, pp. 18-20. Nasr (1996).

<sup>12</sup> Douglas (1973): 'natural' symbols derive from personality, breath, ingestion, etc.

<sup>13</sup> The capitalisation of 'Centre' here distinguishes the conceptual idea of centrality from the physical.

*Three*, the universal human experience (of a world in which we stand upright and survey the ‘up-down, side-to-side, before and behind’ of our location) creates and conditions a universal cognitive imprint of a linear connection.

*Four*, the Jungian view holds that natural symbols are produced spontaneously by the subconscious mind. This effectively removes symbol formation, and recognition, from the reach of the “perceiving consciousness”.<sup>14</sup> In consequence, I suggest, one should neither reject symbols as overly facile, nor accept them too readily as symbols rather than statements. The answer must be to test *in depth and in context*.

An observable correspondence between the object and the thing or concept it represents is often sufficient to fix the two in a memorable mental image.<sup>15</sup> This is the human mind finding instinctive analogies between the known and the unknown, and must be recognised as a human trait even if it is not a secure foundation for a methodology.

This much we can project on to the earliest phase in man’s creation of metaphors of being, and it could well be the determinant of symbol formation in later contexts.

If responses of modern or ancient man to the external and metaphysical world are not *reasoned*, as a tidy methodology would ideally like to see them, another means must be found to test the validity of the pre-literate symbol in the context of an oral tradition.

That ‘everything is reducible to linear or circular forms’, has to take account, for one, of the evidence that the reduction, in terms of *cosmogonical thinking*, limits itself to a few prime **Categories: mountain, tree, pillar, weapon, body or pathway**, for the vertical axis; **cave, house, city, stone or jar**, for the receptive *omphalos*. It will be demonstrated in Appendices 1 and 2 how the interplay of these common symbols provides the elements of a metaphorical discourse.

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<sup>14</sup> Jung (1958) p. 138.

<sup>15</sup> Nadel (1951).

There remains the matter of intention and judgment. How do we distinguish metaphor from statement? When is a person or object a symbol, and when is it purely itself? There has to be a rule of thumb for the correct identification of intended cosmic symbols of the linear / receptive kind outlined in these pages.

I therefore propose that the *Number* and *Quality* of referents, and the presence of major *Categories* of the same, may be used to identify elements of Homeric symbolism.

A **Numerical** sliding scale offers a first measure of identification:

- One linear or round element cannot serve as reliable evidence;
- Two or three, interacting in thematic development, constitute a possibility to be tested;
- One or many in a meaningful relationship with a wider narrative structure creates a *plausible dialogue*.

**Quality** is defined in terms of *recognisable convention*, *appropriateness* and *adaptability*. Here are examples for some major ‘axial’ Categories:

- the bird as a reference to height ... *convention*
- a tree on an island, a tower in a city... *appropriateness*
- a cave as dwelling, womb or underworld entrance... *adaptability*.

A single emblem may be functionally polyvalent. A bird in a tree is both *conventional* (it accords with nature), *appropriate* (to the symbolism of height) and *adaptable* to narrative expansion, as for example in this context:

*‘the ‘god as a bird’ descends from the heavens, the god / bird returns whence it came.’*

A bird is outwardly and primarily a physical entity, but through combined secondary values it may, in context, evoke height, speed, lightness, strength, divinity. When Sleep “went up aloft” into a tree, “where he sat” (as in *Iliad* 14, 286-291) the human personification is subsequently reinforced by a concrete form, a ‘night bird’ which again relates to the opening concept, Sleep; and conversely, when Odysseus is described in simile as an eagle (24, 537f.), it is understood, again in a particular context (the violent Battle in the Hall), that he shares the power and ferocity of a raptor. His

‘transformation’, moreover, fulfils the eagle omen motifs of preceding episodes,<sup>16</sup> thereby creating a minor ‘dialogue’ expanding the original premise.

Even so, *inappropriateness* begs resolution through a secondary and more familiar sense, and may even be intended to draw attention to a particularly central symbol. The *Odyssey* provides examples of just such unexpected imagery embellished with accompanying emotional charges: a tree is a bed post, for example, a ship is ‘fixed’ in the sea, and a father ‘becomes’ a child. Therefore we must add an extra quality: the incongruous, which has the power to extend our perception of person or object.

*Incongruity* may serve as an additional marker, another unconventional and inappropriate but *adaptable and arresting* Quality.

The most salient **Categories** for the determination of cosmic symbolism in ensuing discussion are those defined by Trigger as universals:<sup>17</sup>

- Three planes of existence
- Linear elements (*axes*) and points of transition (*omphaloi*)
- Polarities or dualities (high/low; life/death)
- Supernatural determinatives: power, fertility, timelessness.

These are the bases upon which Homer’s symbolism will be assessed.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. 2, 146-154; 15, 160-165; 20, 240-246. Moulton (1977) pp. 135f.

<sup>17</sup> Trigger (2003) pp. 444-471.

**Part 2: Scholarship*****Symbolism: some preliminary considerations* 13***Max Müller and Solar Mythology* 13***Comparative religion and philosophy* 16***Mircea Eliade* 16*The Traditionalist School* 18*Paul Ricoeur* 20*Peter Kingsley* 21*Peter Struck* 22***Homeric Studies* 24***Homeric Scholarship* 24*Homeric Symbolism:* 26*Laura Slatkin* 26*Gregory Nagy* 27*Shamanism and the Odyssey:* 28*E.A.S. Butterworth* 28*Agathe Thornton* 29*Michael Nagler* 29*Egbert Bakker* 30*Interdisciplinary Studies:* 30*Walter Burkert* 30*Martin West* 30***Comparative Anthropology* 31***Mary Helms* 31*Bruce Trigger* 31*Victor Turner* 33***Archaeology* 35***Some Excavators and Interpreters* 35 - 37*Some Iconographers of the Bronze Age* 37 - 39***Footnote* 39**



### ***Symbolism: Some Preliminary Considerations***

The early Greek philosophers employed both the language of myth and the process of observation and reasoning to explain the visible world. Debate on the beginnings, content and purpose of mythic narratives continues into our own centuries, together with speculation on the socio-religious dimension of such beliefs. Here a brief account of some recent scholarship examines how nature myths and symbolic forms may work together.

**Jacques Dulaure** (1755-1835), an early advocate of 'nature in myth', saw processes of the natural world as the motivation of classical cults, especially those phallic forms allegorised by the old priests. Such cults, he believed, were universal. The theme has been revised more recently by symbolic anthropologist **Mary Douglas** in her *Natural Symbols* (1970) where she describes how the human body provides an apt and accessible metaphor for explaining how we and our society fit into the larger totality of nature.<sup>18</sup> At least four social systems, for example, reflect individual experience in terms of body image.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Solar Mythology***

The predominant element in any nature cult must be the *Sun*, as the greatest impetus to growth and development. However, 'solar hero' and 'solar mythology' require particular definition. The term is often heard to imply that heroes of ancient epic are in some sense equated with the sun; that they 'are' the sun in a symbolic mode such as a dying and resurrecting god, or that some aspects of their character or deeds reflect solar or generally astronomical themes, as do certain objects and events or even

<sup>18</sup> Douglas (1970) pp. 93, 99. This helps to explain the phallic nature of axis and *omphalos* symbolism.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

apparently fictional narratives. The universal identification of light with 'good' and darkness with 'evil' may indeed have conditioned the identification of a hero with solar phenomena, as in the naming of Jesus as 'the light of the world'.

Although there may be a degree of truth in the equation, this is not to be adopted here as a single explanation of the heroic journey. It is thought preferable to consider the epic in the wider cultural context of ancient society in the late Bronze Age or Archaic Age, in so far as we can reconstruct it. Nevertheless the solar perspective cannot be lightly dismissed from early western literature which may have had ancient links to Indo-European traditions.

**F. Max Müller** (1823-1900; *Comparative Mythology*, 1856) as a student of Asian languages and literatures, 'found' the solar pattern and claimed it as a definitive system for the interpretation of European folklore and epic. The religion, philosophy and language of Aryan peoples he traced back to the poetic metaphors of the *Vedas*. Weather patterns and solar phenomena generated explanatory myths, he said, which led man to create anthropomorphisms eventually considered 'real'.<sup>20</sup> Once seen as the founder of the 'science of religion', Müller was later discredited and eventually derided. Nevertheless one recent reassessment of his work claims his ideas to have been misrepresented through oversimplification, and that though wrong, the old scholar was wrong in an interesting and meaningful way.<sup>21</sup>

In his lifetime a vigorous debate concerning the origins of myth brought Müller into confrontation with **Andrew Lang** (1844-1912), for whom mythology represented beliefs surviving from the earliest stages of man's development. Myth is a 'proto-science' which explains natural phenomena aetiologically. In the face of Müller's 'degenerative' analysis, Lang took an anti-diffusionist stance and argued for a

<sup>20</sup> Van den Bosch (2002) pp. 258-265.

<sup>21</sup> Frenschkowski (2003) Review of van den Bosch (2002) pp. 680f.

comparative method demonstrating world wide cross-cultural links between folktales, many of which predated the Indo-European diffusion of Vedic-style literature.

A single theory is no longer seen as a reliable key to understanding the past. We have learned much from the early mythographers, not least the danger of social or ethnographic bias which prioritises the standards of western civilisation. But scholarship moves on, building new theories on old.

An 'astronomical' interpretation of epic, perhaps influenced by Müller, was taken to an improbable extreme by **Edna Leigh** (c. 1960, revised 1999)<sup>22</sup> for whom the whole of the *Iliad* was a compendium of star lore consigned to epic in order to preserve it in memory. The heroes and cities would be the stars and constellations.

**Douglas Frame's** *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic* (1978)<sup>23</sup> turns upon the etymology of verbal roots *nes-* as it appears in the verb *néomai* (to return home), nouns *nostos*, return, and *nóos*, mind.<sup>24</sup> These elements would seem to place the solar aspects of the *Odyssey* on a firmer methodological footing, for close investigation by Frame leads him to propose that forms in *nes-* relate to "return (i.e. from death) to life and light," which supports an analysis of the poem in which themes of *mind* and *return* and *life* and (*solar*) *light* constitute an important strand in the narrative. (The first three are familiar from traditional analyses; it is *light* as a major thematic element which introduces an original cosmic perspective). On this basis Frame advances solar themes in respect of the adventurous journey of Odysseus and his belated return.<sup>25</sup>

Some reviewers<sup>26</sup> are strongly dismissive both of Frame's etymology and his resurrection of solar mythology in an Odyssean context, which too often relies on unsubstantiated 'latency'. But his theory of a solar journey accords well with the

<sup>22</sup> F. & K. Wood (1999).

<sup>23</sup> Frame was a one-time student of Gregory Nagy. Vedic analogies (especially with cattle) are part of his argument.

<sup>24</sup> Frame (1978) pp. ix; 1-33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. pp. 34-80.

<sup>26</sup> Combellack (1981).

astronomical interpretations of the same episodes by more recent scholars Marinatos (2001) and Nakassis (2004) and my own reading of Homeric cosmic patterning.<sup>27</sup>

Scholarship dealing with symbolic Homeric cosmology will be critically assessed in Section IV, as a preface to a new interpretation of the cosmic structuring of the Adventures.

### ***Comparative Religion and Philosophy***

**Mircea Eliade** (1906-1986) was an influential twentieth century historian of religion and myth. He is widely quoted as an exponent of the particular myth of the *axis mundi* and World Centre, yet remains distinctly controversial on the grounds of his tendency to generalisation, lack of scholarly rigour, and subjective judgment. In fact, whilst rejoicing in his free-wheeling approach to myth as a symbolic religious structure, and openly proclaiming himself “an author without a model”, he admitted to methodological shortcomings, never redressed.<sup>28</sup>

Eliade was an intuitive historian who claimed to have found a universal symbolic structure behind the workings of sacred myth. However Bryan Rennie has argued that Eliade’s theoretical basis *was* systematic, and that its internal elements were “reciprocally supporting”.<sup>29</sup> The confusion of his critics may arise from Eliade’s attraction to ambiguities and enigmas, and his refutation of linear arguments, in favour of a method based upon mutually interactive parts of a whole (a holistic structure, and the equivalent of my ‘plausible dialogue’).<sup>30</sup>

I believe he was treating his material on the terms in which he found it amongst its adherents: as an amorphous but internally consistent whole. Many surviving animistic

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<sup>27</sup> IV, pp. 21-42.

<sup>28</sup> D. Allen (2002) p. xii.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. xiv.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. xv. I, pp. 10f.

and totemist beliefs rely to this day upon a 'sympathetic' system which encloses mankind and nature in a single and circular chain of being.<sup>31</sup>

Our present concern is with Eliade's emphasis on symbolism as the language of myth, and with the validity of his interpretation of its cosmic roots, especially the *axis mundi*. Thus a brief outline appears below.

*Eliade's theory of symbolism in myth.*<sup>32</sup>

- Symbols have their own logic and construct their own coherent systems.
- Every coherent system is continuous and universal.
- The polyvalence of the symbol helps us to discover homologies.
- Religious symbols use finite objects and natural phenomena "to point beyond themselves" and "express the inexpressible".<sup>33</sup>
- Religious symbols *can* be translated into logical terms, but
- It is only by recognising specific symbols and reintegrating them within a structural system that the variants reveal meanings not superficially apparent.<sup>34</sup>

The last makes a valuable methodological point: *only if a single symbol can be placed in a larger dialogue can it be seen as valid.*

In the course of the thesis all these criteria, above, will be discussed and demonstrated.

Our particular focus is on the configuration of the Centre, as source, creation and continuity. So again we paraphrase Eliade:

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<sup>31</sup> Turner (1967).

<sup>32</sup> Eliade, *Journal 1*. pp. 3-4. Resumé of Eliade's thinking: Smith (1970).

<sup>33</sup> D. Allen (2002) p. 150f.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 171f.

*Eliade and the Symbolism of the Centre.* <sup>35</sup>

- Every mythic construct incorporates aspects of the Centre.
- Every manifestation of sacrality creates a breakthrough between planes.
- Sacred space so created provides a contact with the divine which may be manifested in cosmic symbols such as tree, pillar or world mountain. The temple or city acts as a meeting point of heaven and earth.
- The 'axial' function of these constructs is found in shamanism, and in all ascension symbolism throughout the world.

Eliade's philosophy of religion includes a rejection of our "impoverished" modern society in favour of the traditional or mythic spiritual history in which symbolic language was the medium of communication. <sup>36</sup>

*The 'Traditionalist' School*

Eliade was reluctant to quote his sources, but there can be little doubt that he was influenced by those advocating a 'Perennial Philosophy', <sup>37</sup> who numbered among their early twentieth century luminaries **René Guénon**, **Frithjof Schuon**, **Ananda Coomaraswamy** and **Titus Burckhardt**.

The movement proposed a unified set of religious values common to all people and all cults. Early among the proponents was the polymath **Gottfried Leibniz** (1646-1716) who sought a universal and internally consistent answer to the questions raised by his many fields of intellectual enquiry. The term was revived in connection with a resolution of eastern and western philosophies, notably by **Aldous Huxley** (1894-1963) author of *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945).

Though much admired in earlier decades, the work of the proponents of a Perennial Philosophy has largely passed out of fashion, although new reprints <sup>38</sup> must reflect a

<sup>35</sup> D. Allen (2002) pp. 168-173. Eliade, *Images* pp. 27-39.

<sup>36</sup> D. Allen (2002) p. 322.

<sup>37</sup> The term was coined during the Renaissance in Italy, under the influence of Neo-Platonism.

<sup>38</sup> *Sophia Perennis et Universalis* and *Quinta Essentia* imprints.

resurgence of interest. The movement (which dates largely from the first half of the last century) inspired the philosophy and creative output of William Blake, Kathleen Raine and T.S. Eliot, to name but a few.

The French Arabist convert **René Guénon** (1886-1951) pioneered the resurgence of 'perennial' thinking in the early twentieth century. In his *Crisis of the Modern World* (1927)<sup>39</sup> he advanced cosmological and other scientific systems as illustrations of a greater metaphysical principle adapted to the physical realm. He was adamant that to suppose a theory could be proved by *facts* was "a delusion",<sup>40</sup> when the same facts can always be explained by a variety of different theories. Guénon was prioritising a divine immanence in the natural order over the human faculty for reason. The divinity could be traced cross-culturally and through variable chronologies without recourse to logical argument, he claimed. The means he found to unravel traditional and ancient belief was to work through the many symbols which expressed a fundamentally coherent metaphysic. The malaise of modern society he attributed, like Eliade, to a loss of the traditional understanding of god and cosmos from which 'scientific' man was now alienated.<sup>41</sup>

The same preoccupations informed the work of his colleague and collaborator, the Anglo-Singhalese geologist, philosopher and iconographer **Ananda K. Coomaraswamy** (1877-1947) who saw myth, folklore, symbolism, art and craft as simultaneous and overlapping expressions of the same reality. Myth, in his book, was a symbolic narrative.

Like Eliade, Coomaraswamy had to face severe criticism on account of his perceived subjectivity in the reading of myth. In reply, he reminded philologists and anthropologists of the four possible levels of meaning involved in any myth or text (literal, moral, allegorical and anagogic-mystical). Any discussion of myth which

<sup>39</sup> Guénon (1927) p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>41</sup> A view held in common with Eliade (I, pp. 16-18) and Coomaraswamy (I, pp. 19-21).

confines itself to its actual shape and neglects its essential form may be 'objective' but cannot be complete.<sup>42</sup> Intriguingly, myth for Coomaraswamy is always the story of a solar hero in quest of the eternal life.<sup>43</sup>

His stated views on symbolism as a precise mode of thought are relevant to my own enquiry, as are his criteria for establishing their validity: namely that subjectivity is to be avoided in favour of *examination of authoritative texts, comparative usage, and the record of active deployment in living tradition*.<sup>44</sup> His definition of symbolism as "the representation of a reality on a certain level of reference by a corresponding reality on another"<sup>45</sup> has been the inspiration for my own interpretation of Homer's symbolism, and more; for Coomaraswamy's syncretising approach, and Guénon's too, yields many illuminating examples of thematic parallels and related imagery in ancient traditions. His wide scholarship embraces both eastern and European symbolism in art, architecture and literature.

Yet since the work of the Traditionalists is so little known today, I turn to the French philosopher **Paul Ricoeur** (1913-2005), whose work in the philosophy of manifestation, particularly the metaphor, also recognises the power of signs and symbols. Speaking appreciatively of Eliade's definition of the sacred as "a function of certain great cosmic polarities",<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur states his own view that vegetation cults bring "to the level of myth and ritual" the mysterious emergence of sacred life. The highest symbolic figure of that "sacrality of life" is the Tree of Life, or Knowledge. A symbol, he explains, "expresses and articulates [the sacredness of nature] and thereby brings it to language", but this can happen in the minds of men only "when they allow the transcendent to appear through them".<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Door* p. xvi, note 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* and note 17.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid. Literary Symbolism*, pp. 184-191, esp. p. 185.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 185.

<sup>46</sup> Ricoeur (1995) p. 52.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 53.



For Ricoeur, symbols operate by means of a series of correspondences. These are paraphrased here in order to underline the essential conformity of the views of Eliade, Ricoeur and the Traditionalists concerning a particular metaphysic of nature:<sup>48</sup>

- original creation is matched with the man-made, as in the temple built to a celestial model;
- the macrocosm has its counterpart in the microcosm, as in the sky / earth and man / woman hierogamies;
- the inner earth functions as a womb; the sun as an eye; and birth equates to springtime;
- the registers of body / house / cosmos, can share an overlapping symbolism whereby the temple pillar = the spine; the house roof = the skull, and the breath = the wind, and so on.

This in Ricoeur's words is a "logic of manifestation", by which I understand a projection of truth from the divine source into a series of interpretable forms.

Ricoeur has no faith in *allegoresis*: "there is no innocent interpretation".<sup>49</sup> Instead, he proposes a structural, genetic system in which the exegete places himself within the dynamic impetus of the text, and works "in the text and through the text".<sup>50</sup> He would wish us to find the pre-existing structure. This he calls *depth semantics*, an idea familiar to other modern philologists,<sup>51</sup> and he proposes that we should interpret each layer in terms of a preceding one, in such a manner that the text unfolds itself.

This appears a sound methodology which accords well with more recent advances in the study of semiotics. It is also a method which finds an echo in the work of **Peter Kingsley**. In his research on Empedocles (1995) and Parmenides (2001) Kingsley pleads for a more thorough contextualisation of the Presocratic philosophers which reevaluates these influential thinkers. Parmenides, for example, whose *Proem* was until now seen as an early argument for the exercise of 'pure reason', is now exposed as a healer, *iatromantis*, who guides initiates in the way of spiritual truth. In *Reality* (2003), a work

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. pp. 53-55.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 139.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. p. 140.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. Stephen Nimis. II, pp. 11f.

recently hailed as “a work of real genius”,<sup>52</sup> Kingsley argues that Parmenides’ poem is a riddle, a poetic incantation which hints that we must break away from all that is familiar to us in order to find a better form of life.<sup>53</sup> The “only way to wisdom”, says Kingsley, speaking for the ancient philosophers, is “by facing the fact that we know nothing and letting our reason be torn apart”.

Perhaps Kingsley argues too emphatically for a reappraisal of early ‘logic’: a compromise between rational and ‘irrational’ which recognises the process of change is not an impossibility, in the case of Parmenidean thinking. But he makes a valuable case for historical contextualisation.

In Kingsley, and in his contemporary **Peter Struck**, *Birth of the Symbol* (2004), we have two thinkers promoting a revalorisation of the ancient world via an emphasis on symbol and magic as components of religion.<sup>54</sup> Struck’s argument that “the [early] Greeks imbue the senseless with the highest order of significance”,<sup>55</sup> devalues Aristotle as a historian of philosophy, but confirms the enigmatic didactic style of the Derveni Orphic Papyrus as a valid early tradition.<sup>56</sup> This lends weight to an assessment of the epic as a symbolic utterance of a similar order, as exposed by the allegorists.<sup>57</sup>

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According to the methodological criteria of Ricoeur, Coomaraswamy and his school, we should look deeply and open-mindedly into the literary symbol, allowing ourselves to be led at each stage and avoiding prejudice or preconception. The process should lead beyond the metaphor. It will however be necessary to find an interconnected or self-supporting symbol system, in which minor motifs contribute to a major theme; and since

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<sup>52</sup> G. Shaw (2004), review.

<sup>53</sup> Kingsley (2002) p. 109f.

<sup>54</sup> Struck (2004) pp. 24, 38 *et passim*.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. p. 201.

<sup>56</sup> II, pp. 38-40.

<sup>57</sup> II, pp. 4-10.

we propose a search for cosmological themes in religious symbolism, we need to begin by concentrating on the natural forms which clothe and express that divine immanence, as the ancients saw it.

Given the antiquity of the poem, 'reason' may not be the single most appropriate tool for its unravelling. That is not to be an argument for neglecting close textual reading, but a prelude to the discovery of deeper inter-textuality. The drama and poetic brilliance of the epic is in no way devalued, but rather, seen as immeasurably complemented by the echoes of a highly refined symbolic mode.

## *Homeric Studies*

### *Scholarship*

Since the texts of the Homeric poems first became available in the west late in the European Renaissance, conceptions of the poet, his work and his society have passed through several phases. From early estimates of the poems as original works combining fact and fiction, scholars have presented us variously with an **Analytic** viewpoint, by which the epic would amount to collections of shorter narratives from many authors, or a **Unitarian** description which saw the epics as the creation of a single poet (a problem long known as the 'Homeric Question').

In the last century, the oral-formulaic perspective proposed by **Milman Parry** (1971)<sup>58</sup> largely eclipsed the previous debate, by proposing epic formation extending over the many centuries preceding the introduction of writing, even to the Mycenaean age. This theory had the advantage of a coherent explanation of poetic composition that seemed to resolve the previous impasse. Formulaic utterance using fixed 'building blocks' or 'type scenes' was to be seen as necessary to improvisation. As an idea apparently confirmed by field studies, a supplementary role was created for anthropology in the interpretation of texts. **Albert Lord's** continuation of the work (1960) on a comparative basis citing English, French and Greek-Byzantine oral tradition, encouraged an interdisciplinary perspective to Homeric studies. Advances, too, in archaeology throughout the last century contributed greatly to our understanding of the historical reality of the Homeric world, and supplemented what was (until the arrival of Schliemann and Evans) largely an exercise in philology.

More recently, criticism of Parry's limitations has exposed a dependence on analogy which neglected differences.<sup>59</sup> Also, the mechanical nature of the tradition appeared not to leave room for the exceptional individual artistry of the poet; nor could the system be

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<sup>58</sup> Parry (1971).

<sup>59</sup> J. M. Foley (1997) p. 160.

used to explain how the audience responded and interacted with the performer. Hence new fields in Homeric studies aim to qualify the 'mechanistic theory'. The traditional epithet ("swift-footed Achilles") can now be seen both as a concrete unit meeting the need for traditional referentiality at the same time as summarising an entire character.<sup>60</sup> In similar vein, **Neoanalysts** (Unitarians) look behind single incidents to show reflections of a broader background, in pre-existent texts, for example.<sup>61</sup> While the newer criticism generally focuses on a poet in control of a traditional medium, it conceives of him as innovative and original. The most 'radical' modern tendency even stresses the role of reader or audience in the production of meaning.<sup>62</sup>

Yet it must be remembered that any textual interpretation turns largely on the question of when, how and why the poems were transcribed. Dictation in the sixth century BC would be a very different matter from transcription in the second or third from the accumulated variants of an ancient school of hereditary Homeridae. The latter event would distance the final text even further from its oral beginnings.

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A late twentieth century **Structuralist** group of largely Parisian scholars (J.-P. Vernant,<sup>63</sup> Marcel Detienne,<sup>64</sup> P. Vidal-Naquet and others) aspired to demonstrate the implicit categories or structures in myth which defined the Greek mentality. Under the inspiration of anthropologist **Claude Levi-Strauss** (1904-1994), they were to establish necessary definitions of the logic of myth and its relationship with emergent Greek philosophy. **Vernant** (1914-2007) took a holistic view of the Greek pantheon, arguing that no one deity can be understood in isolation from others, for the Greek universe can only be explained through a *pattern* of relationships. **Vidal-Naquet** (1930-2006) the historian looked at social practices and ideological equivalents in myth. **Detienne**

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<sup>60</sup> J. M. Foley (1997) pp. 167-170.

<sup>61</sup> Willcock (1997) pp. 174ff.

<sup>62</sup> Peredotto (1997) pp. 381f.

<sup>63</sup> Vernant (1982, 1983).

<sup>64</sup> Detienne (1981, 1996).

(1935- ) typically works through empirical categories (e.g. types of food or plant) to unravel the social implications of symbolism in myth, or, in the case of the maritime powers of Athene (*mētis*, 'active') and Poseidon (elemental force, 'passive'), to define roles through boundaries, connections and differences.<sup>65</sup>

Vernant and colleagues have extracted the logic and relevance of myth and given a historical foundation to the evolution of Greek philosophy which avoids any rigid distinction between 'irrational' myth and 'rational' philosophy.<sup>66</sup> To do so, they have had to unravel the outer wrappings of text and tradition to show the inner correspondences; in other words, to reveal the secondary implications via in-depth reading.

### ***Homeric symbolism***

A number of modern scholars have broached a 'symbolic' reading of the Homeric epic. I have singled out two, Laura Slatkin and Gregory Nagy, who show an interest in allusive and thematic aspects of the epic texts, and others for whom shamanist symbolism is a marked aspect of the *Odyssey*.

**Laura Slatkin**, *The Power of Thetis* (1991) explains that Homer's mode of revelation is oblique, and to our less well-attuned ear, the dramatic development of the epic generally over-lies the unfamiliar symbolism. By decoding the role of Thetis in the *Iliad*, she demonstrates a richness of allusions and co-ordinates. In her preface, Slatkin describes a Homer who evokes themes that "orient" or "supplement" events.<sup>67</sup> The audience would be "listening for what is unspoken";<sup>68</sup> and sharing as they did a common mythic tradition, the allusions would not be lost. This scholar also restates the

<sup>65</sup> Detienne (1981) pp. 30-38.

<sup>66</sup> Buxton, Introduction to Gordon (1981).

<sup>67</sup> Slatkin (1991) p. xv.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. xvi.

importance of defining the culture from which the work emerges,<sup>69</sup> as well as proposing an internally logical (mythic and symbolic) system.<sup>70</sup>

Gregory Nagy has faith in the power of analogy to unlock history. In his comparison of Greek and Indic metre (1974) he has argued for a traditional poetic language antedating the crystallisation of metric units, and this he has found in the ancient *Vedas*. Proposing that the combination ‘fixed noun + epithet’ predates the use of Greek hexameter verse,<sup>71</sup> he steps aside from the ‘mechanical’ Parryite view of the traditional formula in favour of theme as the creative principle.<sup>72</sup> Key words (in an *Odyssey* and *Iliad* conceived as an artistic unity) have revealed a “remarkable pattern of correspondences”.<sup>73</sup> Discussing Agamemnon’s *skeptron*, for example, Nagy notes that it is “imperishable for ever” (*aphthiton aiei*).<sup>74</sup> It is “a thing of nature” become “a thing of culture”, in which *aphthito-* denotes permanence in terms of culture.<sup>75</sup> By following the concept of wilting plant life as represented by the root *phthi-*, Nagy claims to have uncovered a course of thematic vegetal imagery in both *Iliad* and *Odyssey*<sup>76</sup> in which the given root word represents *changeable cosmic order*, i.e. dis-order, as distinguished from permanent cultural order.<sup>77</sup> There are Vedic cognates of the epithet, also associated with cosmic powers.

A similar process determines the use in the *Odyssey* of the terminology of *sema* (sign, and / or tomb).<sup>78</sup> Nagy’s argument is that *sema* as ‘sign’ appears so frequently in a number of formulaic phrases also containing forms of *nōos*, ‘mind, sense, perception’ or *noeō*, ‘to perceive, think through’, to imply that the poet fully intended his audience or reader to interpret the signs as ‘signals’ belonging to a coherent system.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid. p. xiiif.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. xv.

<sup>71</sup> Nagy (1981) p. 2.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. pp. 3f.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. p. 179f.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. p. 181.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. pp. 174-192.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. p. 187.

<sup>78</sup> Nagy (1990b).

James Redfield's foreword to the *Best of the Achaeans* speaks of Nagy's method as "free-associative".<sup>79</sup> The sequence of Nagy's enquiry, he explains, proceeds from

- a) an etymological connection, to
- b) co-occurrences in epic diction; then the author
- c) extracts the meaning of the observed thematic patterns.<sup>80</sup>

Redfield admits it is not a method that recommends itself to all; it is up to the critical reader to see or find for himself.<sup>81</sup>

Here is a dilemma for the student: Homer *is* encoding ancient themes, according to Nagy, and possibly some cosmic ones, but how are they to be validated, if they have to be "found"? Redfield's discomfort is symptomatic of rationalist doubt. Only the volume and appropriateness of evidence will support the theory, we note, since individual identifications are problematic.

A review by Ingalls, whilst generally appreciative, finds Nagy's thought processes "more akin to those of an archaic poet than the careful logic of the scholar".<sup>82</sup> This, I contend, is not total condemnation. The problem is one of reconciling rationalising and instinctive methodologies. Redfield's *aperçu* that Nagy's treatment of an underlying system of meanings cannot be described as "geometry" (presumably 'logical arrangement')<sup>83</sup> but should be seen in terms of a cultural system replete with redundancies ('superfluities') is quite correct in my view. Nagy would be thinking in the way we believe the ancients thought, that is, by analogy.

### ***Shamanism and the Odyssey***

As an example of free association, E. A. S. Butterworth's *Tree at the Navel of the Earth* (1970) is in a class of its own. The author explores the mystical or shamanic ramifications of tree, mountain and *omphalos* symbolism across the world from the

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<sup>79</sup> Nagy (1981) pp. vii f.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. vii.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. p. viii.

<sup>82</sup> Ingalls (1981) p. 276.

<sup>83</sup> Nagy (1981) p. vii.



Akkadian art of the third millennium BC to the Christian mediaeval. This includes Evans' tree and pillar cult and Homeric mythology. His reviewer finds the results unorthodox, ingenious and subjective,<sup>84</sup> but admits both the "impressive erudition"<sup>85</sup> of the work, and his own uncomfortable half-conviction. Butterworth is, I believe, correct in basic principles of symbol formation but his proffered evidence needs critical testing. His belief in a shamanic basis (to the *axis* tree symbol) is supported in **Agathe Thornton's** description of shamanistic elements in the *Odyssey* (1970).<sup>86</sup>

**Michael Nagler's** study of Homer in the oral tradition (1974) recognises many active symbolic ideas,<sup>87</sup> in scenes where "the poetic meaning ["in narrative detail and symbolism"] is realised simultaneously on the level of denotation and...against their broader traditional background".<sup>88</sup> We have to be familiar with the "imagistic associations" which Homer orchestrates, he says.<sup>89</sup> Here is Homer advanced as a symbolising poet, and his skill as specifically related to oral, not written tradition.

In his article on Circe and Calypso (1996) Nagler examined the liminality of the "dread goddesses," who, being endowed with speech, also have a mortal character.<sup>90</sup> In Tiresias, Nagler sees an Atlas-like figure. Our failure to identify Tiresias with "the calm center and motive power of the phenomenal world, beyond all dualities, the *axis mundi*" he attributes to a "rationalization" of the story at the Homeric stage.<sup>91</sup>

Here again we meet a proposal that some at least some of Homer's sources were of a mythic order foreign to reason, or not bound by it. For Nagler, the axis myth is an important symbolic component of the *Odyssey*, with the olive bedpost (revelation,

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<sup>84</sup> Pollard (1974) p. 214.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 215.

<sup>86</sup> Thornton (1970) pp. 22-37.

<sup>87</sup> Nagler (1974) p. 46.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 47.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. pp. 141-143.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. p. 145. First mentions of the axis in connection with the *Odyssey* (in German) are listed, *ibid.* p. 153, note 27.

reunion) intended by the poet to “resonate with *the primordial axis* over which Penelope’s alter-images ...the dread goddesses, preside”.<sup>92</sup>

Positive traces of shamanism detected in the *Odyssey* by these scholars, has largely been a minority view until now. Recently however, **Egbert Bakker** (2006) has returned to the *Apologue* as a typical shaman’s tale of journey to the Otherworld and return. He sees two complementary and parallel genres, the bard’s tale and the shaman’s tale, as co-existing traditions possibly rooted in rituals of the hunt. Odysseus’ poem could be a “shamanized” epic which integrates the “song-action” of the shaman.<sup>93</sup> Since shamanism fosters ‘ascension symbolism’ of the type to be deployed here in interpreting Homer’s cosmic symbols, Bakker’s opinion is important to my argument.

### ***Interdisciplinary studies***

No review of early Greek culture and archaeology would be complete without mention of the contribution of **Walter Burkert**. His prodigious output and breadth of scholarship have embraced philosophy, epigraphy, poetry, lore and science as well as many aspects of Greek religion, such as mystery religion and ritual. His methodology consists of focusing on patterns in the archaeological record and subjecting them to comparative analysis. It is his breadth and depth that make Burkert an unparalleled authority in his field. His work in the field of Near Eastern contacts with early Greece<sup>94</sup> supplements that of **Martin L. West**,<sup>95</sup> who shares with him an original, direct style in the editing and interpretation of Greek texts. Both are invaluable resources for students investigating early Greek civilisation and its received and transmitted influences.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 153. (My emphasis).

<sup>93</sup> Bakker (2006)

<sup>94</sup> Burkert (1992, 2004).

<sup>95</sup> West (1971, 1997).

## *Comparative Anthropology*

We turn now to the field of anthropology and in particular to the question of the reliability of comparisons between cultures, particularly when seeking a universal symbol.

Mary Helms' enquiry into the ideological significance of symbolic space and distance in traditional societies (*Ulysses' Sail*, 1988) is named after the wanderings of Ulysses. Distance from the home centre (Helms names this the *axis mundi*) takes the traveller into supernatural realms where he may discover great treasures and acquire potent secrets which confer on him high status.<sup>96</sup> This mythic, cosmological view recognises Eliade's concept of 'Centre' whilst laying new emphasis on the peripheries of the horizon.<sup>97</sup>

Bruce Trigger (2003) includes the cognitive and symbolic aspects of cosmology and cosmogony among themes he examines cross-culturally. The scope of his study embraces early civilisations in Mesopotamia and the Near East, China, Mexico, Peru and Nigeria, on a time scale ranging from 3,500 BC to 2000 AD. Despite the enormous range of comparanda, cosmic themes register as "constants" in the symbolic systems of these societies,<sup>98</sup> "a generic conceptual framework".<sup>99</sup>

The features he identifies as universals are the following:

- the universe is a series of superimposed levels: sky (gods); underworld (dead); middle (the living, and the supernatural);<sup>100</sup>
- the levels are interconnected at centre or edges;
- the connection is a tree, hill, cave or temple ("gateways");
- 'gods' move through these gateways, and return;
- the earth's flat plane is surrounded by water;
- each early civilisation (and its city-state) believed itself to be at the centre of this plane;<sup>101</sup>

<sup>96</sup> Helms (1988) pp. 3-7.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. pp. 9-11; 60; 114. V, pp. 10-12.

<sup>98</sup> Trigger (2003) pp. 644-650; 444-471.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. p. 447.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. pp. 644.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. pp. 644f.

- the terrestrial plane was divided into quarters, by the solar rising / setting, cardinal or solstice points.<sup>102</sup>

Trigger opines that this conception of the world may go back to “views held in earlier, less complex societies”.<sup>103</sup> At this point he engages with Eliade’s<sup>104</sup> theory that early cultures developed this view in connection with shamanic practices designed to communicate along an *axis mundi* of the sort implicit in the system described. Even a “partially correct” Eliadic hypothesis would account for the “*many otherwise inexplicable cross-cultural uniformities*”, he concedes.<sup>105</sup>

Elsewhere however, Trigger cautions against the widespread, “self-fulfilling” applications of Eliade’s theories to fragmentary data.<sup>106</sup>

The *axis mundi* notion was found among five of the seven cultures examined, but not the Inca or Ancient Egypt, he claims.<sup>107</sup> (Here he may be in error. The Inca capital was Cuzco, ‘navel’ and geographical centre of their empire. The role of the *djed* pillar in maintaining cosmic order in Egypt is well attested).<sup>108</sup>

Another conceptual problem identified with Eliade’s views is cultural variation in the defining of direction, which make accurate comparisons difficult to control.<sup>109</sup> Variants in orientation (south or north as primary focus, for example) or differences in names, colours, symbols or functions of the four directions which are named among many other cultural disparities,<sup>110</sup> are only to be expected as local variants, I believe, and do not seriously detract from the central argument. Overall, Trigger is willing to concede that Eliade’s general ideas about the cosmos are well-enough founded, but he cannot accept more specific beliefs as universals.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid. p. 645.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 645.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 645. Eliade, *Return* pp. 12f.

<sup>105</sup> Trigger op. cit. p. 645, my emphasis.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 445.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 445f.

<sup>108</sup> **Appendix 2, pp. 8-14.**

<sup>109</sup> Trigger op. cit. p. 446.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. pp. 447-455.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. p. 470.

Trigger's explanation for the wide distribution of the central axis and "quadripartition" (four directions) draws upon universal human experience of the natural world, allied to verticality of the human body and the 'scanning circle' of the human eye.<sup>112</sup> This is a tenable assumption, and one that still leaves room for the formation of localised idiosyncrasies whilst accounting for the universal symbol.

More testing of the theory, as Trigger advises, would in my view require (as a complement to comparative studies) a wider, more focused analysis of *axis* iconography than is presently available to scholars. Meanwhile, Trigger's muted acceptance of Eliade's vision of a universal cosmic pattern does not detract from his own discovery of an import set of 'constants' which will serve here as support to a specialised application.

Particularly encouraging from the perspective of this enquiry is the "striking" degree of conformity and "worldwide distribution"<sup>113</sup> that Trigger found in matters of cosmology and cosmogony among his target civilisations, which could not be accounted for on the basis of common historical origins such as migration.

**Victor Turner** (1920-1983) composed major works on comparative anthropology, notably *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (1974) and *The Forest of Symbols* (1967). In his foreword to *Dramas*, Turner sets out his belief that symbols have an important role to play in cultural processes, and it is *via* symbols that the researcher is able to reconstruct the connections between culture, cognition and perception in societies.<sup>114</sup> His discipline is of an order generally classed as 'scientific' as it requires empirical observation and enquiry, but Turner values the role of instinct as a generator of hypotheses: "the intuitions, not the tissue of logic connecting them, are what tend to survive the field experience".<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. p. 455f.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 454.

<sup>114</sup> Turner (1974) p. 7.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. p. 23.

## *Archaeology*

We turn now to scholarship relating to the Aegean world, especially its art and architecture.

### *Some Excavators and Interpreters*

(Sir) Arthur Evans, the excavator of Knossos and author of a multi-volume work on the palace (1921-1936), has been criticised for his ‘vandalism’ in reconstructing the great palace on his own terms, and even more so for bringing to the task a Victorian mindset that romanticised the Minoans and their way of life. This is all with hindsight, and we are all, for better or worse, of our time. Evans was an intuitive scholar whose achievements, within the limitations of early archaeology, were immense. With the presentation early in the excavation at Knossos of his 1901 article ‘The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult’, an early attempt was made to reconstruct the cult practices of the palace from available analogies.

Only scraps of evidence lay at hand: Greek, Egyptian and European mythology, and undated materials from a similarly broad area. It was a poor basis for the comparative study that was undertaken, yet Evans somehow bound it into a plausible argument which was to provide a starting point for the gradual establishment of a scholarly framework for the new science of archaeology.

His 1901 article proposed the existence of ‘sacred’ trees in dedicated shrines where pillars or stones also featured, both of which may also have exerted a sacral function.<sup>116</sup> From such evidence, he was led to propose a widespread cult associating the tree and pillar as repositories of the *numen* of the divinity.<sup>117</sup> This he recognised as a dual cult of “primitive religious type”.<sup>118</sup> There is insistence on looking from “the standpoint of

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<sup>116</sup> Evans, *TPC* p. 100.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 105f.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p. 105.

primitive [sic] ideas”,<sup>119</sup> rather than from the perspective of later specialised cults. The excavator is quite rightly insisting on contextualisation. Unfortunately he had no secure contexts for his discoveries, and had to resort to scattered comparanda and contrasts.

Similarities of form led to the identification of parallel functions, as for example in the case of offertory tables incorporating a central stone, an essential feature found also in baetylic altars.<sup>120</sup> The identification rests variously on etymology (Semitic ‘*bethel*’= Greek ‘*baetyl*’), leaps of imagination identifying the pillar as an aniconic Cretan Zeus of legend, practicality, corner posts “only added for security”, and comparisons with Greek and Hittite material forms.<sup>121</sup> Although these hazardous guesses compromise his interpretation of sacred tree and pillar as variants, the foundations of his theory have found confirmation in later iconographical studies, for example by Marinatos (1984a, 1989, 1990).

Evans was involved in controversy early in his work of reconstruction at Knossos, in particular in debate with Alan Wace over the chronology of Mycenaean and Cretan palaces. Yet Evans’ instinctual approach which drew upon his profound scholarship may (I suggest) have tapped into an archetypal symbolism less accessible to categorisation.

I am encouraged in this view by **J. A. MacGillivray** (2000a) who has been inspired by Evans’ disproportionate successes at Knossos (given the limitations of that time) to propose that current archaeological practice, in which systematic recording precedes interpretation, should be supplemented by an intuitive element.<sup>122</sup>

By the time **Martin P. Nilsson** (1874-1967) completed his painstaking collection and organisation of available material in *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion* (1927), several more sites had been opened up and sufficient time for reflection on Evans’

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid. pp. 112-118, figs 6-14.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

<sup>122</sup> MacGillivray (2000a) p. 9.

achievement had passed. Working with more abundant examples, Nilsson both disagreed and agreed with Evans. The two men differed in temperament and technique: where Evans was willing to exploit every possible avenue, Nilsson rejected broad comparisons, admitted only to “hypotheses”,<sup>123</sup> and defined the difficulties of interpreting “the picture book without text”.<sup>124</sup> His major contribution was to insist upon sequential evidence. The description of *related* material (such as sacred dress, for example) was to precede the analysis of religious ritual. It was a necessary caution which furthered the creation of a reliable methodology.

**Axel Persson** (1889-1951) took the work a stage further by drawing attention to the wealth of material contained in the iconography of religious scenes on signet rings. Although he could still do no more than “hypothesise” their meaning<sup>125</sup> and advise caution in interpretation,<sup>126</sup> Persson contributed to the fuller description of such pieces, a vital step towards reconstructing the civilisation represented.

Subsequent scholarship, having moved away from reliance on the interpretation of myth, and aided by scientific advances and ever more successful excavations, has created specialist fields such as *cult places*, Rutkowski (1972, 1986) and Gesell (1985); *religion*, Marinatos (1993); *sanctuaries*, Marinatos and Hägg (1993), *architecture* Preziosi (1983) and Preziosi and Hitchcock (1999); *ritual space*, Renfrew (1985) and Kyriakidis (2005); *socio-political issues*, Cherry (1986); *archaeo-astronomy*, Goodison (2001, 2004) and Blomberg and Henrikson (1996), and *iconography*, with studies by L. Morgan (1988), S. P. Morris (1992), and Crowley (1989a), to name but a few.

My own enquiry draws inspiration from the specialised area of Bronze Age iconography and religion in which **Nanno Marinatos** has a breadth of practical experience and knowledge of the Eastern Mediterranean. Like Burkert, she follows and

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p. 10.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>125</sup> Persson (1942) p. 35.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. pp. 30, 104.



compares patterns across cultures. Her *Minoan Religion* (1993) is a first resource which provides a broad descriptive overview of sacred forms and ritual (priesthood, shrines) together with evidence of religious practice in Crete between 1650 and 1140. Parallel phenomena of documented Near Eastern cultures are invoked, and Eliade, van Gennep and Victor Turner are among the authorities quoted. She does at times indulge in some cautious speculation *re* the *axis mundi* and cross cultural parallels.<sup>127</sup>

Only limited interpretations of objects and situations are provided, and some of her arguments were (unsurprisingly) challenged as “tentative” or “tenuous” by her reviewer Gregory Alles.<sup>128</sup> J. C. Wright voiced further criticism that she neglects the political, economic and artistic aspects of the evidence in an article<sup>129</sup> that provoked a vigorous defence of her own methodology from Marinatos.<sup>130</sup> She insists upon the importance of an analytic art historical approach to iconography (examination of space, gesture, size, dress, roles, etc.) and counters that if her focus is narrow, as accused by Wright, it is both valid and complementary to other methodologies.

Marinatos’ colleague and collaborator **Robin Hägg** has investigated Greek sanctuaries and palaces, and the cults and the social gatherings that took place there. These and others are constantly extending our knowledge of the Aegean monuments by giving them a living context. I am particularly indebted to all the contributors to the *Aegaeum* series.

### *Some Iconographers of the Bronze Age*

**Janice Crowley** has lead the way in establishing a methodology for describing early Aegean art and its formative influences. A major concern is standardisation of the

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<sup>127</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 45.

<sup>128</sup> Alles (1994) pp. 435f.

<sup>129</sup> J. C. Wright (1995).

<sup>130</sup> Marinatos (1995a).

terminology and identification of individual motifs.<sup>131</sup> Her largely a-historical approach, whilst recognising that the imagery expresses some “ideal”, is tentative *re* interpretation. She does however make the interesting observation that an icon functions in many ways like oral poetry: it has standard epithets and repetitions, but even the variations correspond to recognisable organising systems.<sup>132</sup>

**Lyvia Morgan** has been an innovative thinker in this field, and her detailed work on the Thera frescoes, a milestone in iconographic studies (1988). Her methodological statement<sup>133</sup> advises a progressive development which first takes in defined groups (plants, people, landscape) and defines them in the natural world (using ‘scientific’ disciplines) before situating them with a wider body of comparanda. This process uncovers a multiplicity of possible meanings, but there is no final in-depth interpretation.

Morgan is taken to task for ignoring potential narrative quality in her chosen scenes. **Sarah P. Morris**, for example,<sup>134</sup> sees some aspects of the Thera Ship Fresco as forerunners to epic motifs, since embarkation, armour, duel and siege scenes in art may all be relevant to Homeric episodes and shared traditions. Morris has made a further case for eastern influences in Aegean art, in her interdisciplinary pursuit of a focused theme, in *Daidalos* (1992).

**Carol G. Thomas** stretches iconographical interpretation even further, suggesting the application of cognitive schemes and references to oral tradition, on the basis that art and poetry both reflect the society that creates them. Both media, it is proposed, may employ ‘set formulas’ and reveal an overlap of natural and supernatural worlds.<sup>135</sup>

**Jan Bouzek** writes of a Cretan use of a very old artistic vocabulary, such as the spiral (the involution-evolution pattern of nature). He speaks of “pre-sapiental” wisdom,

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<sup>131</sup> Crowley (1992) p. 25.

<sup>132</sup> Crowley (1989) p. 211.

<sup>133</sup> Morgan (1988) Introduction and Part I.

<sup>134</sup> S. P. Morris (1989).

<sup>135</sup> Thomas (1992) pp. 214, 218.

and of “a sense of order”, as distinguishing marks of Cretan art.<sup>136</sup> This is to give the Minoan art forms a very long history and a metaphysical perspective.

**Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood**, in contrast, has made a strong case for extreme rigour in the interpretation of visual and verbal imagery.<sup>137</sup> She is highly aware of the “perceptual filters” which prejudice our interpretation of the past.<sup>138</sup> A progressive methodology is advanced which takes account not only of the relationship of elements and their connotations, but also those elements which are absent.<sup>139</sup> Elsewhere,<sup>140</sup> a rigorous standard for the close contextualisation of both image and myth (which leaves little room for any intuitive response) is proposed as the only reliable methodology.

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### *Footnote*

Some Homeric scholars now appear willing to consider that the epic was structured to entertain or inform a pre-literate audience sensitive to allusion. Further, developments in archaeology currently permit a degree of cautious interpretation of undocumented imagery. Both fields are wary of comparanda, but in the case of cosmic imagery there appears to be a case for a universalism providing a feasible basis for cross-cultural or multi-disciplinary comparisons.

It remains to establish the tradition wherein signs, portents and secondary significance of all kinds could form part of an oral culture in the Aegean area. ‘Allegorical’ interpretations of Homer will be perused, together with routes of influence and transmission for ideas and the broad historical context in which the epic evolved.

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<sup>136</sup> Bouzek (1992) pp. 176-178.

<sup>137</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1987, 1991).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. (1989) p. 241f.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. p. 243.

<sup>140</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1987, 1991).

***Section Two: Homer's Symbolism. The context, the form, the purpose***

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### *Omens, Portents and Signs*

The poet brings a profound understanding of human psychology to his characterisation of major and minor players; he also gives us heroes who debate and deliberate before acting, and reflect upon the outcome.<sup>1</sup> But the same figures move through a natural world suffused with meaning and intelligence of a higher order, which shows itself through omens and portents (flights of birds, or perhaps rolls of thunder). Privileged individuals such as Tiresias<sup>2</sup> and Theoklymenos<sup>3</sup> understand the signs. In such a climate, a poet gifted beyond the ordinary may well feel empowered as prophet and interpreter by the influence of the Muse.

Homer gives many instances of faith in signs. Penelope dreams of the death of her pet geese, for example (19, 535-550) and laments them; the ‘combat of the eagles’ over Ithaka is interpreted by a reader of portents in Telemachus’ favour (2, 146-176), and Odysseus prays for and receives tokens of divine encouragement for his programme of revenge on the suitors (20, 1-53; 95-121). Today such beliefs would almost certainly be seen as unreliable superstitions.

Yet at one point our poet projects a healthy (narrative) scepticism concerning the value of omens and dreams which hints at a pragmatic detachment. Penelope is assured by the dream-voice of Odysseus (19, 545-550) and the beggar man himself (554-558) that her goose-dream indicates the certain death of the suitors. But she rejects the evidence, being confused and distressed by the intellectual conundrum of deception versus truth, and torn between dreams from “the gates of sawn ivory” or those from “gates of polished horn”. Penelope’s negative reading of her experience (568-581) leads to her setting up of the contest of the axes, “to be remembered in [her] dreams” (581) thus taking the argument full circle.

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<sup>1</sup> Logical ability: Hektor: *Il.* 22, 98-130; Odysseus: 20, 9-24.

<sup>2</sup> 11, 100-137.

<sup>3</sup> 15, 525-534; 17, 150-161.

In these lines there is an interplay of trust and mistrust (can omens ever be true?) which finally goes hand in hand with impartial decision making and decisive action ignoring or supplementing the supposedly 'divine' reassurance. We may be witnessing the work of a poet of his time and culture, or, a believer in prophecy; on the other hand, are we perhaps in the presence of a poet revealing in his narrative voice, an independent intelligence commenting on earlier beliefs? What strikes the seeker-out of Homer's symbols is the idea of a controlling mind willing to use the symbolism of dreams and omens as a narrative tool. This leaves us with the image of a knowing craftsman capable of ironic utterance and inviting his audience into the shadowy world of multiple meanings – whether antithetical pairs like Circe and Kalypso, or in the several instances of lies and deceptions, dreams, omens and evocative metaphors, anticipations and recall, all of which condense at the same time as they enlarge the canvas of epic action.

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We cannot be sure how sensitive to nuanced allusion any Homeric audience might or might not have proved. With this proviso, the current section will explore the *internal* evidence for a Homeric subtext, before consulting ancient literary criticism and the 'secrecy' principle in mystery religions.

## *Allegory*

### **Homer the Theologian?**

In the epics there are undeniable pointers to a world beyond the human, to the fate of souls after death, and to the presence of supernatural beings in epiphany. Heroes and seers alike receive privileged epiphanies. But the narrative voice, the poet's own, is the one we seek for an insight into an evolved theology, and to this end 'Homer the poet' must somehow be distinguished from the heroic world of which he speaks.<sup>4</sup>

Did the poet go further, to propose himself as a visionary? Only indirectly, I believe, in his characterisation of singers and seers, and in very few excursions into the narrative voice. He makes his presence felt in his opening evocations of the Muses in both epics. There may be a self-portrait in the singers Demodokos, "surpassing / in power to please" (8, 44f.) or Phemios, who "can charm" (1, 338), or even Achilles, the hero-as-singer (*Il.* 9, 189). At the very least, these figures characterise a strong and venerable tradition of song worthy of the epithet "divine" (*theion aiodon*, or *theios aiodos*) which is used twelve times in the *Odyssey*. The poet, by analogy, may share that divinity.<sup>5</sup>

From being a 'Demodokos,' Homer is elevated from the fifth century to a 'Kalchas', or even, *o theologos*, a term more frequently applied to Orpheus.<sup>6</sup> The process begins (at the earliest discernible moment) with the naming by Herodotus<sup>7</sup> of Homer and Hesiod as those who "provided the Greeks with...the origins of the gods and gave the gods their names...their honours and skills..."

One definition of divine insight is projected upon his character Kalchas the seer, whose knowledge embraces past, present and future.<sup>8</sup> This may form part of the poet's own visionary *persona*, or a model intended to equate human divination with the powers of supernatural beings. Marcel Detienne contends that Homer's *mousa* amounts

<sup>4</sup> *Il.* 12, 449: Hektor's strength is greater than that of two men, "such as men are now".

<sup>5</sup> Cornford (1952) p. 98: in India, poet means 'seer'.

<sup>6</sup> Lamberton (1986) p. 27f.

<sup>7</sup> Herodotus, *History* 2, 53f.

<sup>8</sup> *Il.* 1, 70.

to a religious power drawn from an external source, which works with the poet's exercise of memory to bring about *aletheia*, or truth.<sup>9</sup> In performance, the poet who emphasises his dependency on the Muses (*Il.* 2, 484-493) becomes a *maître de vérité* on a par with kings, diviners and seers who employed the same methods.<sup>10</sup>

On balance, the mantic power claimed by the poet on behalf of his performance is so close to a personal possession of supernatural insight by one so favoured by the divinities, that it may be imagined that this poet, for one, did indeed feel endowed with a power beyond the ordinary. Such a power might be sensed as an 'entitlement' or duty to 'educate'.

### Allegoresis

In view of Homer's opacity and in pursuit of a hidden subtext (*hyponoia*, later known as *allegoria*) we turn to the poet's successors for some clue to the Homeric inner meaning, if any. A distinction must first be made between a poet's intention to allegorise<sup>11</sup> and the interpretation of a discovered allegory which is the concern of the exegete-philosopher (*allegoresis*). This definition distinguishes the compositional from the analytic process.

In determining the 'when, how and why' of this interpretive tradition, an essential caveat is made: the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are unique in being the surviving products of an oral tradition of great antiquity. Once the poems could be read and judged as 'literature', as opposed to being heard and experienced in performance, interpretations were severely compromised. As there is a lack of documentary evidence for the pre-Platonic era and very little of such interpretive activity in Plato's account, several centuries separate the epics themselves from the first examples of true allegorical reading.

<sup>9</sup> Detienne (1996) p. 39 *passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> The poet's use of mist (*aer*) and Hera in *Il.* 21, 6f.: "Hera let fall / a deep mist..." may qualify as allegory, but is disputed by Richardson (1993) *ad loc.* p. 54, as later *allegoresis*.



Yet these early opinions have insights to offer. A profile of the most salient and frequently stated criteria of allegorical interpretation, as expressed among Pythagoreans, Platonists and Stoics, is presented here in condensed form as a prelude to examining individual writers:<sup>12</sup>

- The poetry of Homer is too elevated (or ‘divine’) for the tasteless and paradoxical elements to be accidental.
- Hence their inclusion is meaningful.
- Homer concealed a body of mystical belief. Sensitive matters were to be concealed from the lesser mind, or from the uninitiated.
- The ‘encoded’ content can be extracted by the application of reason.
- Enigmas, paradoxes and symbols are the markers to this hidden content.

These are some methodological pointers to future analysis.

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The advancement of Homer as an allegorist had its beginnings in the mid-sixth century **Pythagorean movement** in southern Italy. The society practising in Pythagoras’<sup>13</sup> name was characterised by secrecy and the use of *symbola*. Enigmatic epigrams dealing with ethics, ritual, cosmology, or the gods were pronounced by the master and cherished by his disciples as encapsulated wisdom. They were collectively known as *Pythagoreia symbola* from the fourth century to late antiquity.<sup>14</sup> Burkert attributes a pre-classical or archaic tradition for Pythagorean wisdom, which would put the process back even more closely to Homeric times and earlier cult practices.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> From Lamberton (1986) and Brisson (2004).

<sup>13</sup> Born mid 6<sup>th</sup>. century.

<sup>14</sup> Struck (2004) p. 97.

<sup>15</sup> Burkert (1972) pp. 166.

Peter Struck argues that it was the Pythagorean tradition that linked enigmatic language with *symbola* and their hidden meanings, especially when the *symbola* were used as passwords. In this way the word progressed from the ‘authentication’ aspect into the sense of hidden language: “the power of the symbol is born out of the power of the secret”.<sup>16</sup>

Opinion is divided on the influence of the Pythagoreans on the development of allegorical readings of Homer.<sup>17</sup> The most telling evidence concerns the early use of Homeric texts for magical purposes (incantations) and as moral *exempla*.<sup>18</sup> This process implies a reverence for the text as revealed and potent knowledge, and text itself as an agent for change.

**Theagenes of Rhegium** (c. 525) provides the earliest surviving evidence of an allegorising treatment of Homer, with an interpretation of the *Iliad*’s ‘Battle of the Gods’ which was seen by later sources as a conflict of natural elements.<sup>19</sup>

In the **Platonic system** (Plato c. 429-347) *mythos*, the unverifiable, co-exists with *logos*, the ‘verifiable discourse’. Whilst myth still has its uses for Plato, *mimesis* as the traditional and poetic way of figuring the beyond no longer prevails. The spiritual life demands rigorous self-discipline from the individual; hence such philosophic expertise, being out of the reach of the masses, effectively devalued the collective religious practices of the established culture and its mythic referents. Yet, inspired by and under the influence of Pythagoras, early Empire philosophers of the Platonic school continued to see myth as ‘symbol’ and ‘enigma’, both of which were accessible to rational interpretation, especially by those initiated into the mysteries. In consequence, the recognition of secrecy as a condition of enlightenment entered the exegetical tradition and

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<sup>16</sup> Struck (2004) p. 102.

<sup>17</sup> Lamberton (1986) pp. 32f.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. p. 35f.; Boyancé (1937) pp. 121-131.

<sup>19</sup> Most (1999) p. 340.

acted as an explanation of the inconsistencies of myth. The oral traditions in the Pythagorean scheme were designated *aenigmata*, or obscurities to be elucidated from their ciphered forms.<sup>20</sup>

**Aristotle** (384-322) found a metaphysic in the old mythology, in which the tradition inherited from the (Presocratic) forefathers revealed that “the divine encloses the whole of nature”.<sup>21</sup> This is the beginnings of a tendency to appreciate the inner sense of an earlier tradition. He actively practised the art of allegorical interpretation in his commentary on the Golden Chain of Zeus (*Il.* 8, 1-27) where the great god is identified as the “primordial Mover” who stands outside the creation of which he is the prime impetus.<sup>22</sup>

**Socrates** voices the difficulties in unravelling meaning in the sense of the poet’s intention.<sup>23</sup> Plato’s sophist Protagoras defends the antiquity of his métier - light-heartedly perhaps - by asserting that there have always been sophists who “made a screen and masked it, some with poetry, like Homer, Hesiod and Simonides, some with initiations and oracles...”<sup>24</sup>

The myths had come to be interpreted allegorically as cryptic utterances even before the **Stoics** generated the greatest interest in this mode of interpretation. Only fragments of their criticism remain, but **Heraclitus**’ (c. 540) *Homeric Allegories* survive intact to display an inherited tradition, and **Crates of Mallos**’ (early 2nd. century) *Rectification of Homer* favoured an allegorical reading of the epics as cosmological myths.

A key Stoic text for our purpose is **Cicero**’s (106-43 AD) *On the Nature of the Gods*, where an allegorical reading of the myth is stated as the only way to grasp what is true in religion; whilst in his *Compendium of Greek Theology*, the later Stoic **Cornutus** (1<sup>st</sup>. century AD) tells us “...men of antiquity were no common men, but...competent to

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<sup>20</sup> Brisson (2004) pp. 56, 58f. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Λ 8. 1074b 1-14.

<sup>22</sup> Aristotle, *Movement of Animals* 4. 699 b32-700 a6.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Protagoras* 347e.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 316d.

understand the nature of the cosmos and were inclined to make philosophical statements about it through symbols and riddles”.<sup>25</sup>

A major contribution to the vindication of *allegoresis* arises from **Plutarch’s** (50-120 AD) recognition that the mythic ‘outer covering’ may be incongruous or even absurd.<sup>26</sup>

The importance of **Numenius** (2<sup>nd</sup>. century AD) to the present argument lies in Porphyry’s claim that his was the inspiration for the most evolved allegorical interpretation (of a Homeric passage) that remains extant: the allegory of the Cave of the Nymphs. Numenius was a syncretising philosopher prepared in the name of ‘absolute truth’, to seek out the “harmonious” cults and doctrines of Plato, Pythagoras, the Jews, Egyptians, Magi and Brahmins.<sup>27</sup>

When we come to **Porphyry** (3<sup>rd</sup>. century AD) we broach the most complete explication of Homeric allegory. The basis of his methodology is set out in a fragment of a lost work, *The Styx*, preserved by Stobaeus:

“The poet’s thought is not... easily grasped, for all the ancients expressed matters concerning the gods and *daimones* through riddles, but Homer went to even greater lengths to keep these things hidden and refrained from speaking of them directly but rather used those things he did say to reveal other things beyond their obvious meanings.”<sup>28</sup>

The full text of the allegory is too complex to detain us here, but will be touched upon later. Porphyry’s interpretation (implied in his reading of the *Cave of the Nymphs*) that Odysseus’ journey was a cosmic and spiritual voyage, corresponds closely to the present writer’s conclusions. His understanding of the cave as an image of the cosmos,

<sup>25</sup> Chapter 35: 75. 18; 76. 5.

<sup>26</sup> *Isis and Osiris*, 11. *Moralia* 358 f.-359 a.

<sup>27</sup> Fragment 1a. Lambertson (1986) pp. 61ff., note 53.

<sup>28</sup> *Eclogae* 2. 1.19.

where the spiritual condition of man is defined by opposing paths to and from the eternal, attributes an allegorising intention to the great poet.

That is not to say that Porphyry's reading is the incontrovertibly correct one. Historically there are many readings and many levels of interpretation and these not necessarily in conflict. Nor are the foundations of the exegetical tradition necessarily infallible: the influence attributed to the mysteries may be falsely aetiological, for one. What may without controversy be gleaned from Porphyry's analysis and from many others' is the fact that Homer's text has the *potential* to be an allegory, thus an exercise in deliberately encoded meaning, and has inspired early philosophers to interpret him as an intentional allegorist.

This study will endeavour to bring potential into actuality by uncovering the careful structuring of an integral pattern.

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The work of the allegorists encourages a new view of particular objects employed in a significant manner. The 'significance' of some objects selected for their enigmatic or thematic importance will here be attributed to a hidden metaphysic determined by cosmological patterns, in particular those established by the ancient mythology of the *axis mundi*. Taking the advice of Proclus, we will go inside the myths, "to see what sort of natures, and what great power, [the mythographers] have introduced into the meaning of myths and directed them to posterity by means of this type of symbol".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *In Platonis rem publicam*. I. 85.

## *Figures of Speech in Homer's Epics*

From the allegorical process and its uncertainties we turn now to an area in which there can be less doubt that the poet intended his audience to grasp more than one level of meaning: the figure of speech. Our poet was a master of sophisticated evocation, and his texts resound with distant echoes of other places, and other times.

### **The Simile**

#### **Semiotics**

Since justice can scarcely be done to Homer's similes in a few lines, comments are confined here to what Nimis (1988) has called in his semiotic study of the epic tradition, "privileged connections" of "intertexts" in the Homeric poems. "The reader does indeed constitute the meaning of a text, but s/he does so in part by bringing together a newly encountered text with other texts or fragments of texts which s/he has encountered before".<sup>30</sup>

The author illustrates this process by a lengthy interpretation of the "dissimilar simile" of the preparation for battle by the Myrmidons (*Il.* 16, 155-167). A preparatory meal is part of the 'prelude to battle' formula, but in this image the combatants are compared with wolves eating their flesh raw, glutting their bellies on the stag they have killed in the mountains. This is a negation of civilised eating among potential heroes which creates a paradoxical image at this narrative moment: deliberately so, explains Nimis, because the reader is intended to engage with the simile at a deeper level which is that of the '*hypogram*,' or subtext, concerning the conventions of feasting. The engagement is activated by *a surface inconsistency*<sup>31</sup> which is resolved once the underlying motivation is grasped.<sup>32</sup> Through several 'woodsman' similes, the concept 'insatiability' is further worked out as a metaphor for greed and violence, says Nimis, in

<sup>30</sup> Nimis (1988) p. 15, online. This statement presupposes a sophisticated audience.

<sup>31</sup> The 'incongruity' factor.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pp. 3f.

the context of bloody battle, and this is the core meaning of the atypical behaviour of the warriors in the wolf simile.<sup>33</sup>

‘*Incongruity*’ and ‘*intertextuality*’ are mentioned by Nimis as a measure for the identification of secondary levels of meaning. Furthermore, his conviction (*passim*) that the simile is part of an authorial strategy in the production and structuring of the epic encourages a view of the poet as a skilled ‘juggler’ who could keep several strands of inference alive and active at any given moment. Once again, this prospect encourages a view that such a performer could also manipulate both text and subtext.

Nimis employs a “rhetorical-thematic” approach to simile analysis which looks at the wider context of the simile in the poem.

The term is Richard Buxton’s. The latter sees this as only one approach to the Homeric simile, but it is one with which he concurs.<sup>34</sup> I will argue that such *multiplicity of forms* is the necessary clue to understanding the cosmic dimension that Homer introduces into his poetry, and it is the ambiguity created by such contracted metaphors which provides the impetus to uncover a secondary meaning.

### **Deconstructing ambiguities**

My own choice of bird similes from the *Odyssey* illustrates a possible Homeric subtext. Odysseus’ stringing of the bow in book 21, his fingers as deft as a musician’s, produces a latent comparison of weapon and lyre. To test the bowstring, he plucks it (as one would the lyre) and it sings like a swallow (411). So now the bow-lyre ‘is’ metaphorically a bird, and (potentially), ‘is’ the ‘bird’ Athene, who sits in the rafters in the likeness of a swallow in the following book 22, in lines 236-240. In this instance, Athene-as-Mentor has urged Odysseus into action before retreating to her high place, “a swallow,” “perched” (239f.). Shortly after, the goddess waves her *aegis*, “from high

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid. pp. 23-86.

<sup>34</sup> Buxton (2004) pp. 141f.

aloft in the roof" (298, though we are not told her form) causing a stampede among the suitors and driving Odysseus and his companions into an orgy of hunting in the form of "beak-bent vultures" (302).

In my reading, the bird motif constitutes a link between the successful (goddess-led?) stringing of the bow in which Athene played the part of a swallow, leading to her active championing of the revenge of the hero in his capacity as a bird of prey. The interpretation can be extended to embrace a message of divine sanction which is articulated through the bird messengers of the gods.

The completed exercise illustrates the binding, unifying power of the Homeric simile which spans episodes and establishes a thematic motif. Indeed, an analysis of the same simile by E. K. Borthwick adds the seasonal aspect of the swallow's migratory return to its home in spring, in which there would be a thematic connection with Odysseus' desired return to his own hearth.<sup>35</sup>

### The metaphysics of simile

D. F. Rauber has set himself the challenging task of finding a metaphysical element in the Homeric similes of the *Iliad*. I here apply Rauber's five principal methodological criteria<sup>36</sup> (italicised in the bullet points overleaf) to an analysis of the 'shipwreck' simile, wherein Penelope finally recognises the proof of the olive tree bed offered by her husband and tearfully accepts his embrace:

"And *as* when the land appears welcome to men who are swimming,  
after Poseidon has smashed their strong-built ship on the open  
water, pounding it with the weight of wind and the heavy  
seas, and only a few escape the gray water landward  
by swimming, with a thick scurf of salt coated upon them,  
and gladly they set foot on the shore, escaping the evil;  
*so* welcome was her husband to her as she looked upon him  
and she could not let him go from the embrace of her white arms". 23, 233-240.

<sup>35</sup> Borthwick (1998) pp. 155f. The hero's hearth: *Od.* 14, 159 = 19, 304 = 20, 231; 23, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Rauber (1969) pp. 97-101.



This is the seminal moment in the *nostos* of the hero, and Homer marks it with a complex simile which not only reinforces the joint emotion of the participants but draws in recollections of the wider narrative thread of the epic. The simile unfolds as follows:

- *A link to the narrative.* Penelope acts in character, by shedding tears, and displaying a normal human response to her husband's return.

- *An extension beyond the narrative.* The first six lines of the simile are extremely detailed and are equally 'true to nature' and 'true' to the narrative 'grammaticality'. They recall the enmity shown to Odysseus by Poseidon, who smashed his ships and raft. Ultimately, as we know, he was the only one of the crew to survive, his companions having perished at sea. The safe landing on Scheria is recalled in the detail of his salt encrustation (cf. 5, 455f.; 6, 226). Gladly indeed did Odysseus set foot on that shore, "and kissed the grain-giving soil" (5, 463).

- *There is a common or shared nexus.* On Ithaka, Penelope suffered a disorder as grievous as any faced by Odysseus in his travels. Both longed for his *nostos*, and are overjoyed by the reunion.

So far, the simile has sustained the narrative and underlined the course of the mutual sufferings of hero and heroine which have filled the previous twenty two books. The development has inflated the 'As' element. The final 'So' factor introduces a startling reversal wherein Penelope is suddenly and irrationally cast as the shipwrecked sailor and Odysseus, against nature, as the sighted land, so:

- *An unnatural, disjointed or unexpected factor is introduced.* We have been following the trials of 'Odysseus the swimmer', but the imagery is reversed to give us 'Penelope the swimmer'. In a marked gender reversal, the poetic figure is set on its head: Penelope has never yet to our audience-knowledge stepped outside the *oikos*, let alone gone to sea. But she has a close association with water through her constant weeping. This reversal creates a second extension, with Odysseus suddenly the shore-dweller, as he has longed to be for many years.

- *A more profound similarity is concealed behind the reversal.* This amounts to a second shared nexus of a more metaphysical order, which the listener will need to extract imaginatively from his own instinctive response to the imagery. Here is a suggested reading:

Man and woman have suffered equally through opposite but complementary trials. Their reunion heals the pain of each. Their shared suffering unites them more deeply

than a mundane separation could have achieved. Consequently they are *as one* in this profound identification one with the other, as conveyed by the embraces ascribed first to Odysseus (23, 232) and then to his wife (23, 240). Perhaps the theme here (and it must be theme, for the simile has dealt exhaustively with the subject matter) is that rare and desirable *homophrosyne* in marriage which Odysseus wished upon Nausicaa at their initial meeting- when shipwrecked on the sandy shore of Scheria (6, 180-185).

Simile inconsistencies, or similes designed as contexts for the unexpected, are therefore to be considered as potential markers of subtext. They are after all, already playing with at least two layers of meaning via tenor and vehicle, which is entirely appropriate to a 'riddling' intention by the poet. When such stylistic devices introduce *irrationalities* or *incongruities*, it may be found that major *semata* are concealed.

### The Metaphor

Metaphor is a close cousin of the simile, ostensibly requiring only the omission of the 'like', 'as', or 'so'. The absence of conjunctions merely makes meaning more elusive. The ambiguous epithet "wine-dark [sea]," for example, is the classic example of evocative poetry, but impenetrable meaning. Surprise in metaphor provides an important poetic device which cannot be underestimated, and metaphor itself constitutes a latent riddle to be solved.<sup>37</sup>

There is no literal truth in a metaphor, rather is it an open-ended invitation to the reader or audience to discover for themselves the force of implicit or latent similarities. Metaphors achieve poetic force by stimulating emotions and attitudes at the same time as they suggest new relationships between objects and values. They engage the listener at complex levels, and whatever the individual finds in the comparison may well prove quite distinct from the next person's reading.

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<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1458 a 23-33. Ricoeur (1978) pp. 26, 34.

As far as religious metaphor is concerned, there are certain fixed associations which create a framework for the unfolding spiritual narrative: for example, *height and ascent* are associated with heaven, divinity and power; *light* translates knowledge and revelation; *water* conveys both chaos, through formlessness, and regeneration, via its cleansing function; *fire* similarly can be both destructive and purifying. These are universals in nearly every faith system, and evident too in Homer's poetry, as will be shown.<sup>38</sup> Such associations can easily be overlooked since they are so very familiar, but it will be argued that they are essentially aligned to ancient symbolisms of the spiritual quest.

### Personification

In the *Iliad*, Homer introduces several personifications, among whom are two brothers, Sleep and Death (16, 682); also Fear and Terror (15, 119, cf. 4, 440; 13, 299). These last are abstractions elevated to human form by the power of a name, which is an abstraction moving towards personification. We might also consider Poseidon as a personification of the sea (and Zeus the skies, Athene as mind or wisdom) but with their proper noun nomenclature, the sense of the human (and the inimical, or kindly) is brought into the foreground. In either event, 'interchangeability' of forms and functions is at work in the anthropomorphising process, as a propulsive factor in the animation of the narrative discourse. Thus the anger of Achilleus becomes 'Strife', *Eris*, (*Il.* 4, 440-445) and though he does not 'personify' anger, it works through him.<sup>39</sup>

Emma Stafford makes a case for Themis of the *Iliad* as a personification of 'social order' (*Il.* 15, 87-92).<sup>40</sup> When, at the feast, Hera addresses Themis as '*thea*' and accepts a cup from her hands, a physical presence is conferred on a 'goddess'. Historically a

<sup>38</sup> *Height and ascent*: Olympos, and the movement of the gods as birds; *light*: on Olympos; Kalypso's cave (5, 59) and Athene's lamp, 19, 33-40; *water*: tempests at sea, and ritual bathing; *fire*: Odysseus "a seed of fire" (5, 490).

<sup>39</sup> J. Whitman (1987) p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Stafford (2000) pp. 45f.

possible 'earth divinity', <sup>41</sup> the personified Themis can feasibly be traced back by this route to phenomenological beginnings in *seasonal* or *vegetative* order.

When dealing with personification, I believe we should again think in terms of the depth semantics of symbolism, rather than confining our assessment to figurative 'ornament'. In this way we may find a route back to the defining principle behind the human figure.

### Models and Patterns

Ian Barbour provides a useful classification of systematically-developed and repeated metaphors, which, when they cluster frequently enough, constitute 'a model'. The model has a wider range and application than the metaphor or simile. Barbour's given example is 'God as a father to his children', a condensed figure defining love, purpose and surety, he suggests. <sup>42</sup> This is an example relevant to the *Odyssey*, which plays upon the concept of fatherhood with at least six similes linking the affections of Laertes, Odysseus, Telemachus, Athene and the loyal servants. <sup>43</sup> The hero may not *be* a god, but is frequently 'god-like', and his presence or absence creates a counterpoint between stability and well-being, and instability and confusion, throughout the poem.

As neither literal truth nor imaginative fiction, a model such as 'fatherhood' which rests upon a figure of speech, provides something more substantial than either truth or fiction: it provides a systematic, critical tool for understanding humanity through recall of some constants in human experience. <sup>44</sup>

The substance of Barbour's theory is the apparent contradiction between the language of religion (*subjective- hence 'false'*) and the language of science (*objective-*

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Barbour (1974) p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> 1, 306-8; 2, 47; 2, 234; 5, 12; 14, 139-141; 17, 109-113.

<sup>44</sup> Barbour (1974) pp. 49-56.

hence 'true').<sup>45</sup> His investigation leads to the conclusion that rather than an absolute dichotomy between the two, there stand only differences of degree. Both the theoretical models of science and the models of religion work via imaginative analogies to explain the natural world. They are temporary psychological aids, not to be taken literally, but modified. They are selective *symbolic* representations of the inaccessible.<sup>46</sup>

In our *Odyssey*, symbols which interpret the cosmic pattern alternately reveal themselves and melt away into textual density as the epic ebbs and flows, but I intend to show that they also assist in the formation of a thematic unity of 'modular' proportions.<sup>47</sup> If the relationship between minor symbols and the wider unity can be shown to be structural to this degree, then there will be a basis for evaluating the centrality or otherwise of Homer's cosmological system.

The employment of motif and theme as forms of repetition ("composition by theme") has been explored by Steven Lowenstam, who demonstrates how parallelisms and polarities function in the epics to unify and concentrate the text. They are more than a compositional tool, he suggests; they have literary significance reflecting an ancient interest in such correlations.<sup>48</sup> Like the Homeric simile, a paradigm such as the comparable home situations of Agamemnon and Odysseus, (and Klytaimestra, Helen, and Penelope) can explore either similarity or difference, and the oppositions will play as meaningful a part in the final definition as will the convergences.

From the elaboration of theme the development reaches out to draw in other threads of the story, through allusion, recall and foreknowledge. At this point the repetition is becoming structural. We may see this as the extension of a model, which could be for example 'culture versus (wild) nature,' an exemplar of a desirable social structure, which

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. pp. 7f., 171f.

<sup>47</sup> Section IV, the cosmic journey of Odysseus.

<sup>48</sup> Lowenstam (1993) p. 2f. *passim*.

finds its narrative place in personifications, similes and metaphors, and polarised encounters between good and bad.<sup>49</sup>

‘Order’ is a key element in the *Odyssey*, where it is a well-developed theme as well as a structural element. Whereas, for example, the indolent suitors exemplify social disorder in Ithaka, the harmony which reigns in Aiolos’ household, and Nestor’s, and Menelaos’, provide contrasting exemplars of civilised living. Book 8 of the *Odyssey* is composed around numerous polar opposites contrasting “force, deeds and violence” with “craft, words and non-violence”.<sup>50</sup> Lowenstam demonstrates how the contrasting roles of the public and private places (*agora* v. *megaron* = *negotium* v. *otium*) act as an exemplar of social order, upon which rests true wisdom. The opposing functions of *agora* and *megaron* underline and echo, for one, the role of violence in Odysseus’ Adventures, and for another, they explain the suitors’ necessary presence in the palace.

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In this way certain polarities create models which control and synthesise the parts of the whole.

<sup>49</sup> E.g. in the Cyclops episode (9, 105-542).

<sup>50</sup> Lowenstam (1993) pp. 145-173.

<sup>51</sup> Lloyd (1966) pp. 90ff. on polarity as a Greek mode of thought. Austin (1975) pp. 199ff., and 90, quotes Emile Durkheim on polarity as an organising system in ancient thinking.

## *The Historicity of the epics*

### **Linear B.**

The accidental preservation of inscribed clay tablets, roughly 5,000 in all, at Knossos, Pylos, Mycenae, Tiryns and Thebes has left a precious but limited legacy of early mythology from some of the greatest 'story centres' of the Greek world. Although largely documenting administrative transactions, the Linear B tablets give a glimpse of the leading deities of the period 1400-1200, long before the first texts of Homer and Hesiod. The attestation of certain divinities known to later mythology gives an indication of their antiquity: Poseidon, Zeus, Ares, Dionysos and Hermes are recorded at Knossos and the Greek mainland;<sup>52</sup> from Knossos and Thebes comes mention of *po-ti-ni-ja*, possibly the 'Lady of Athens', whilst Hera and Artemis are among the goddesses recorded at Pylos.<sup>53</sup> Eileithyia, whose cave at Amnisos on Crete was known to Homer (*Od.* 19, 188) is remembered in a Knossian tablet from Pylos which registers the sending of honey to the goddess 'Eleuthia' or 'Eileuthia'.<sup>54</sup> In total, seventy mythical names are traced in the tablets.

These are small but important tokens of an earlier theocracy than Homer's pantheon, but it must be noted that other names are missing: there is no Aphrodite, Hephaistos, Hestia or Demeter.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, insights provided into the distribution of material goods to cult places, and the very existence of an early form of written language, add immeasurably to our knowledge of life in the late Bronze Age in the Aegean, and supplement the archaeological record. Their value lies in the identification of Mycenaean and Minoan sites, social and administrative systems, religion, agriculture, weaponry and war, craft and trade.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Palaima (2004) pp. 439-454; p. 443.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid pp. 443ff.

<sup>54</sup> KN Gg (3) 705. Palaima (2004) pp. 444 (table), 448, uses both spellings.

<sup>55</sup> Palaima (2004) p. 443.

<sup>56</sup> Chadwick (1976) chaps. 3-9.

The tablets' value in estimating the historicity of the epics (or lack of it) is outlined by Chadwick.<sup>57</sup> One line of inquiry is the matching of place names (eg. the Catalogue of Ships) with the equivalents on the tablets. The results are disappointing, due perhaps to Homer's faulty geography. Chadwick has to admit that poetry and history "belong to different universes".<sup>58</sup>

In the present state of our knowledge, the cosmological imagery we seek is unlikely to emerge from the tablets, though the pictographic system of Linear A may in time yield more information.<sup>59</sup>

### **Mycenaean Language and Archaeology**

Linguistic continuity, however restricted, gives hope that other traditions of Mycenaean origin might also have been preserved in Greek oral poetry. Language and belief are part of cultural identity, and one may be pursued through the medium of the other, via semantics and cognitive linguistics. As editor and interpreter of Linear B tablets, John Chadwick was able to argue on linguistic grounds that the Greek epic ("in living evolution" to the eighth century) had its roots in the Mycenaean age,<sup>60</sup> and O'Brien<sup>61</sup> has worked from etymologies to build a case for the pre-Hellenic characters of Hera and Achilles in the Mycenaean era. But G. P. Shipp<sup>62</sup> disputes Chadwick's view, finding the evidence "hazardous", on the grounds that obsolete words in the poems cannot be linked directly to the tablets, since there is a difference in sense between one and the other.<sup>63</sup>

The whole question of a 'Mycenaean' Homer traceable through either (or both) language and monuments is likewise contested by Dickinson, who is firmly of the belief

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<sup>57</sup> Chadwick (1976) pp. 185f.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

<sup>59</sup> E.g. from the Phaistos disc, c. 1700.

<sup>60</sup> Chadwick (1958) p. 116.

<sup>61</sup> O'Brien (1993) pp. 113-119.

<sup>62</sup> Shipp (1961) pp. 1ff.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 2.



that the bulk of archaic or archaisising elements in Homer can be attributed to the Dark Age of Greek history. 'Historical truth' he considers to be irrelevant to the Homeric world, and memorisation no guarantee of accuracy. We cannot be sure that Mycenaean epic, if any existed, used the hexameter form, and so little is known about linguistic change in Greek, he argues, that even those forms that are demonstrably old could still have prevailed in Dark Age usage.

Apparent 'archaeological' evidence from the Homeric text has been tried and tested, originally by Heinrich Schliemann, and more latterly by Hilda Lorimer in her *Homer and the Monuments* (1950), but without clear resolution. However, E. S. Sherratt (1990) demonstrates that literary and archaeological records *can* be read together, and does so by establishing a stratigraphy relating 'survival categories' in archaeology (warfare, housing, burial, etc.) to "fossilized traces" of the same items in the literary record. She correctly warns against constructing a composite picture from the texts as a whole, <sup>64</sup> but has been able to distinguish three separate time periods (palatial Mycenaean, 12-9<sup>th</sup> century post-palatial, and later 8<sup>th</sup> century) from textual elements confirmed in the archaeological record. <sup>65</sup> The Mycenaean phase is represented in Homer by recall of 16<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> century weaponry and armour, architectural detail, and the value of iron.

Here are conflicting viewpoints concerning certain limited but historical *realia*. Nevertheless I hold that a reading of the epic *as metaphor*, which finally unravels a belief system capable of informing material culture, would not necessarily be compromised by the lack of empirical evidence. Therefore it is language and related imagery which would seem to offer the most promising lines of enquiry.

Might the fixed aspect of formulaic evidence conserve historical detail? Milman Parry and Albert Lord have revealed the repetitive nature of epic formulae. The genre

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<sup>64</sup> Sherratt (1990) p. 158.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. figure 4, p. 159.

scenes in particular (arming, fighting, assembly, feasting, and sacrifice) are elements less susceptible to variation on account of their traditional formatting and regular repetition, and from such resources, scholars such as M. I. Finley have reconstructed a composite picture of a ninth or tenth century “*World of Odysseus*” (1999), whilst T. B. L. Webster <sup>66</sup> and A. Andrewes <sup>67</sup> have projected an eleventh to twelfth century chronology for the same world. Informative they may be, but there is ostensibly little to be found there of demonstrable cosmic importance, which is our primary concern.

One might hope to uncover the formula as a ‘fossil’ in which history was held in suspension. Yet it is no longer certain that Homer applied his formulaic epithets ‘mechanically’ as metric considerations might require. Dickinson, sceptical in such matters, points out that since the Greek language underwent considerable change in the intervening centuries, many ‘Mycenaean formulae’ would cease to fit the metre. <sup>68</sup>

The case for Mycenaean ancestry is problematic, but not to be dismissed entirely. If any Homeric cosmology is to be found and related to the Bronze Age past, it will not necessarily occur in the surface text, even of formulae. If, as argued here, such topics are the substance of mystery or privileged information, they are more likely to be found via indirect allusion.

### Transmission and Influence

Neighbouring Near Eastern cultures may provide some clues to Homer’s symbolism. The poet hints at transmission or diffusion with his reference (17, 383ff.) to the *demiergoi*, who “[work] for the people”, for, as “a prophet, or a healer of sickness, or a skilled workman, or inspired singer,” they “[go] visiting elsewhere”. Moreover, from Menelaos’ travels through Cyprus, Phoenicia, Egypt and the Mediterranean in book four

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<sup>66</sup> Webster (1958) chap. 4.

<sup>67</sup> Andrewes (1967) pp. 38-47.

<sup>68</sup> Dickinson (1986) p. 22.

of the *Odyssey*, cultural exchanges among the ranks of an élite are attested, albeit fictionally.

With the incursion of proto-Greek speakers into the centre and south of the Greek mainland (as we now know it) in the late third millennium, the native 'Aegean' culture of this period received an infusion of ideas which may well have included some religious beliefs and mythology.<sup>69</sup> Established trade routes also linked the territory to the Near and Middle East, overland via Anatolia or by sea, via Cyprus.<sup>70</sup> Trade links between Egypt, Mesopotamia the Aegean and even the Indus Valley civilisation in the third millennium, are attested by material finds in those areas.<sup>71</sup>

At a distance of only 500 kilometres, a direct sea route was suitable for direct trading or diplomatic contact between Egypt and Crete, whose exchanges, as summarised by Peter Warren,<sup>72</sup> cover raw materials, completed objects, technological skills and ideological matters of political, religious, social and symbolic natures. This iconographical correspondence is evidence for interlocking, penetrating and modifying exchanges of belief and ideology, he claims.<sup>73</sup>

Studying examples in detail, Lyvia Morgan agrees that at a certain point a special relationship existed between Aegean artists and Egypt.<sup>74</sup> What is more, evidence of Near Eastern and Egyptian imports into LH I-III Mycenae indicates the latter as a "gateway community" for importation of foreign goods.<sup>75</sup> The seventeenth century saw 'oriental' culture impacting upon Crete and Greece, and Minoan culture beginning to exert an influence on its mainland neighbours. Within a few centuries Mycenaeans were to become active in Crete, where they traded, colonised, conquered, and exported their pottery into the Levant, probably via Cyprus. These connections would seem to have

<sup>69</sup> West (1997) p. 1f. Meuli (1935).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. pp. 2-5. S. Morris (1992) pp. 95-99, 102-115.

<sup>71</sup> Yamauchi (1967) pp. 26-32, 92.

<sup>72</sup> Warren (2000) p. 25f.

<sup>73</sup> Warren (1995) p. 12. McEvelley (2002) pp. 1-22..

<sup>74</sup> Morgan (1995) p. 44.

<sup>75</sup> Cline (1995) p. 95f.

flourished and given rise to fertilising two-way cross-currents of culture and commerce which lasted into the early twelfth century, until compromised by the violent disruption attributed to the arrival of 'sea peoples' who attacked coastal and inland areas around the Eastern Mediterranean basin as far south as the Egyptian heartland.

There followed centuries of greatly modified trading activity and shifts of power and influence. Mercantile trade conducted by Phoenicians is well attested from 900 onwards, and confirmed by passages in the *Odyssey* which deal with the activities of pirates and merchants (15, 459ff.). By the mid eighth century, Greece and the Levant were in close contact and it is possible to speak of an 'orientalising' renaissance or revolution.<sup>76</sup>

The conclusions of Martin West (1997) and Walter Burkert (1992 and 2004) on the nature of these counter-currents, in so far as they may be relevant to the evolution of the ideology and form of epics, are summarised here with page references.

**West (1997):**

- Some shared pictorial and iconographic motifs (10), loan words (12), transmission of writing (24-28) and common interest in astronomy (29-31).
- A similar ideology of a hereditary kingship. Military leaders responsible for judgment and overlordship and to some degree, priesthood (14-19).
- The *skeptron* (17) and throne (563) symbols of authority in both instances.
- Connections of religious usage between Syria / Palestine and Mycenaean and Archaic Greece (33-38).
- The worship of trees and pillars and stones as prevalent in the Near Eastern lands as it was in Crete and the mainland (33f.)
- Literary parallelisms from Mesopotamian, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Hittite and Hurrian sources and especially, from *Gilgamesh* (61-106).

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<sup>76</sup> Burkert, *Orientalizing*.

Burkert (2004) *BMP*; (1992) *Orientalizing*:

- “Continuous demonstrable contact... in space and time” (2004, p. 47).
- Similarities in style between oriental epic and Homeric poetry; works such as Gilgamesh can no longer be ignored in interpreting Homer (2004, pp. 24ff.; 1992, 114-120). Certain type scenes, formulae, direct speech, lion similes, lands blessed under a good king, and tales of gods and great men are among shared features.
- Concerning magic and cosmogony, “images, practices and mythical tales” are found to be mutually connected (1992, pp. 124-127).

### Transfer of Imagery

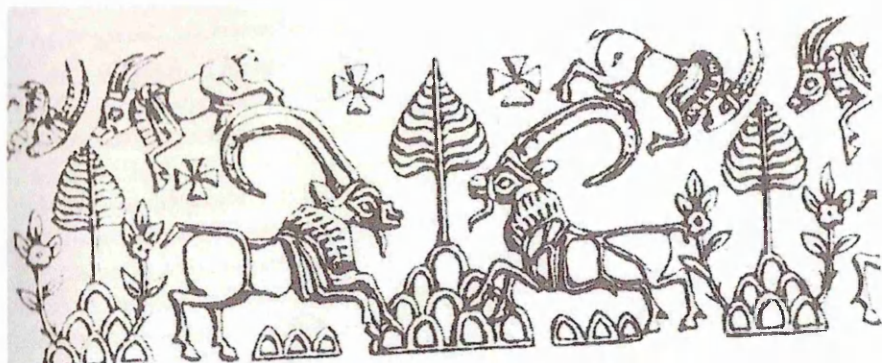
A measure of iconographic evidence further connects the Indus valley and Mesopotamia, and ultimately, Greece. They share one of the most basic structure of ancient art: the ‘heraldic’, flanking composition with a central, sacred figure (man, tree, animal or mountain) accompanied by matching side animals or objects.<sup>77</sup> It is the ‘Tripartite’ prototype we shall meet over and again in Aegean iconography, as a Master of the Animals, the Lion Gate, or a columned façade.<sup>78</sup> Here we see it as a mountain with tree, flanked by goats (II, 1), the central nexus itself reiterated to either side. There are certain affinities with the Zakros rhyton from Crete (V, fig. 21, p. 44).

Fig. II, 1.

Sumerian Seal impression.

4<sup>th</sup>. - 3<sup>rd</sup>. millennium.

McEvelley (2002) p. 247. fig. 7.



<sup>77</sup> McEvelley (2002) pp. 247-260.

<sup>78</sup> V, pp. 19-24, 42-46.

This shared sacred imagery illustrates a commonality of ideas which may eventually yield evidence of parallel ideology.

None, however, of the identified correspondences (with the possible exception of *Gilgamesh*) provides any conclusive proof that eastern or other external influences were more than marginal in their contribution to the Homeric corpus. On the other hand, by setting aside possible sources of material emerging from highly developed cultures in close proximity to early Greece, we ignore a balancing body of material which once contributed to the overall ambience of Homer's world. Martin West, for one, strongly refutes the "autonomy of early Greek culture", <sup>79</sup> and proposes that oriental influence was felt in Greece for some centuries before the early Archaic age in which we place the first Homeric texts.

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<sup>79</sup> West (1997) p. 59.

## *Orality and related issues*

### **Cognitive linguistics**

Walter J. Ong has directed his studies to the nature of orality and the impact of writing and print on the course of our thinking. His *Orality and Literacy* (1982) uses cognitive linguistic studies to challenge the superiority of the literary mode. Thought and its verbal expression in *oral* cultures are contrasted to the *literate* mode of thought and expression, and it is revealed how carelessly we prioritise the latter, and by a false aetiology, view the oral antecedent as a variant of the literate.<sup>80</sup> We should judge orality on its own terms.

The Homeric poet possessed primary orality, in the sense that he was unlikely to have possessed any literate skills. (Even so, the introduction of writing did not at first alter the oral mentality).<sup>81</sup>

Ong's sees the oral poet functioning as a repository of his community's history, sharing their ideology and responding to their changing needs. Difficult abstractions are grounded in real life, to the extent that his style becomes concrete and condensed. But at the same time as serving his fellow man, the poet preserves for them the voice of divinity.

Gregory Nagy prioritises the oral-traditional in the performance of epic. Whilst developing a critique of Parry and Lord's fieldwork, he stressed the importance of a dual perspective (synchronic and diachronic) in assessing Homer's achievement.<sup>82</sup> He proposes a long view, which holds the epic to have been many centuries in evolution. For him, the epic is an interactive communal activity and as such becomes the on-going record of a society in evolution. Homer cannot be understood in the synchronic perspective alone. From this latter perspective, the text may preserve past practices

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<sup>80</sup> Ong (1982) pp. 1f.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. pp. 9f.

<sup>82</sup> Bostock (2004) reviewing Nagy (2003).

which cease to be valid for later years, and there *are* demonstrable archaic elements, such as the singer Demodokos' use of the lyre (later rhapsodic performance was unaccompanied).

Nagy's proofs of the long-term orality of the epic rely largely upon linguistic analysis. In his article 'Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and The White Rock of Leukas' (1973), he proposes an extended solar metaphor in Odysseus' travels, as well as 'sunset-sunrise,' 'sun gate' and 'sun chariot' thematic imagery in the *Odyssey*, constituting a cosmic model of death and rebirth.<sup>83</sup> He singles out the Rg-Vedic solar psychopomp, Pusan, and the Asvins (horsemen) as further solar symbols who find Greek counterparts in Phaon the ferryman and the twin Dioskouroi.<sup>84</sup> The *Rg Veda* is cited at several points, as a source of "striking parallelism" with the Homeric context.<sup>85</sup>

Nagy's case for a long view of the Indo-European oral tradition as a reservoir of literary and religious didactic imagery corresponds with my own view that a latent symbolism of great antiquity informs the epic language of Homer.

Potentially useful, too, is Nagy's insistence on Homer as a transmitter of myth (rather than a creative innovator of the same)<sup>86</sup> which again presupposes ancient and possibly traceable elements which could serve as bases of comparison.

### **Anthropological approaches**

Ong's theories, and Nagy's, can be supplemented from recent field research among enduring oral societies.

After witnessing thousands of oral narratives in southern Africa, Harold Scheub developed his theory of "fixed and unfixed symbols". He observed that the surface narrative consisted of 'clichés,' i.e. fixed symbols (defined as fundamental narrative

<sup>83</sup> Nagy (1973) pp. 139, 161, *passim*.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid. pp. 172-175, notes 94, 96, 98.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 161, note 66; pp. 162-166.

<sup>86</sup> Nagy (1996) chap. 4.



elements) with which the audience was familiar. These were manipulated to create a secondary network of 'unstable' symbols, for the life of the performance.

Scheub (1971) witnessed the close involvement of the African audience in the performance and its wide knowledge of inherited images and clichés shared with the performer. This he calls an "epic matrix" and proposes "a depth of meaning not readily available to the outside".<sup>87</sup> Only within the context of the total body of the narratives known to poet and community would the hidden symbols become comprehensible. These symbols are the pathways to themes; and these themes were never revealed in an openly didactic way.<sup>88</sup> This interpretation supposes a sophisticated dialogue between performer and audience. It also meets the Saussurian<sup>89</sup> distinction between *langue*, tradition, in which everything is formulaic, and *parole*, performance, in which all is fresh and individual.

Given the astounding level of internal references in the form of anticipation and recall, layered story patterns (the *Apologue*), as well as thematic interplays in the similes (which include reverse imagery of gender and relationships) it is highly probable that our poet too was responding to an audience well-versed in epic techniques.<sup>90</sup> A supportive relationship on the African model quoted above would go some way towards explaining both the great endeavour involved in sustaining ('juggling') so many narrative elements, and the apparent lack of clarity where matters of belief were concerned. It appears that an audience of skilled and responsive listeners of the kind witnessed by Scheub, whatever their other experience or status, could catch and appreciate many an ephemeral allusion.

The research of anthropologist Victor Turner reconstructs how man may have built the abstractions which he eventually developed into the narrative elements of myth.

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<sup>87</sup> Scheub (1971) p. 268.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. pp. 269f.

<sup>89</sup> Saussure (1983).

<sup>90</sup> Appreciative audiences for Demodokos: 8, 367-369, and 8, 91, "they joyed in his stories."

From sensory experience of the majesty of the heavens and the abundance of the earth, upright man refined explicating metaphors to explain, interpret and discuss what for him was beyond all knowing.

Turner describes the enormous range of meanings, interrelations and values that a simple bared twig, some grass and a piece of termite nest could hold for the Ndembu people.<sup>91</sup> A symbol of this order is the objective token employed in ritual situations, “a dynamic entity”.<sup>92</sup>

Turner defined the functions of ritual symbols as, progressively,

*condensing*- into a single formula;

*unifying*- separate *significata* conjoin through analogy;

*polarizing*- both ideological and sensory (phenomenological) aspects co-exist.<sup>93</sup>

Here is a system which corresponds, in essence, to Homer’s imagery: this builds upon resemblances between physical objects, co-ordinates and finally develops them into major themes or patterns. Whilst remaining functional, as ‘objects’ (lance, mast, pillar, etc.) they come to bear a metaphysical significance, I shall argue.<sup>94</sup>

Turner observed, listened to the indigenous people, and interpreted. He found many dominant symbols and *variable or “instrumental” symbols* directed at a specific goal of the individual ritual.<sup>95</sup> This is much in accord with Scheub’s “fixed and unstable images”, and confirms the notion of a fluid and adaptable symbol system giving constants and specifics. The author’s analysis of liminal customs<sup>96</sup> in initiation provides especially useful insights into the possible sense of the Odyssean journey.

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<sup>91</sup> Turner (1967) pp. 280-298. Diagram 9, p. 297.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid p. 20.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. pp. 27f.

<sup>94</sup> III, IV.

<sup>95</sup> Turner (1967). pp. 45f.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. pp. 93-111. IV.

### Oral poetics and formulaic language

‘Orality’ in the context of Homeric scholarship has to address major issues of authorship, composition, preservation, performance and reception. Interpretation of the texts can turn critically upon such historical aspects as these, and particularly on how we should evaluate Parry’s original thesis concerning formulaicity. But since our definitive version of the texts has been preserved from a late stage in the tradition there would seem little prospect of recovering *meaning* from those formulaic elements that we can identify.

On the other hand, ‘type scenes’ recurring in fixed patterns, such as the ‘arming’ scenes in the *Iliad*,<sup>97</sup> match the formulaic model to the extent that they follow a basic pattern (e.g. a sequence: always greaves, breastplate, shield, helmet and finally, spear). Yet each has its minor and meaningful variations which often reverberate with implications for the wider narrative; Patroklos, for example, takes up two spears (16, 139-142) but one is the spear of Achilles, and only Achilles can wield it, and it will be taken up by the greater hero in a later arming (19, 387-391). It is in patterning such as this, I contend, which both *uses the fixed form and transcends it to create a wider structural entity*, which gives the most profitable basis for establishing major issues such as religious belief, social priorities and heroic values. And it is the similarities and differences which arise from the formulae and type scenes, doublets and repetitions, which funnel our thoughts and emotions towards the poet’s desired objectives.

If Homer’s symbols are largely lost to us, it may be because we no longer enjoy the listening skills of the orally educated, whose ear is attuned to the significant variation. The text is a complex, multi-layered phenomenon incorporating vanished social values and religious traditions, and the poet, unfortunately, has left us little in the way of a patent code-breaking system.

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<sup>97</sup> *Il.* 3, 328-338; 11, 15-44; 16, 130-154; 19, 364-424.

### ***Religion, Myth and Magic***

The religious practices of the pre-Homeric world, in so far as we can recover them, may shed some light on the part played by secrecy in early cult. Here, set out independently but not, it is emphasised, self-contained in isolating vacuum, are some of the formative traditions which may have determined or reflected the poet's philosophy. Cosmogonic elements relative to the axis myth have been brought to the fore.

### **Greek Religion**

The early practice of religious rites in Greece was conducted in the open air, in front of the house of the god (where one existed), or in the form of public games under the bright sky. It was therefore open to all. The spirituality of the Greeks which was to inspire the Hellenised world grew out of the traditional feeling that the gods were everywhere, not only in the sacred places dedicated to them, but in the humbler areas of farm and homestead.<sup>98</sup> Therefore belief was not at an early time divorced from the beauties of nature or the rhythms of agrarian life. Where a sacred *temenos* was set up, it was generally in recognition of the particular holiness of the location, as experienced rather than conceptualised. To that extent, early religion in Greece drew upon the natural world where divine order and presence were to be found. In worshipping together, this early society expressed the commonality of their situation as natural beings in an ordered universe. It is little surprise therefore that so many of Homer's similes draw upon animal imagery, or that his pantheon of gods, *theoi*, constitute an anthropomorphic foreground of divinities which enables humans to understand and rationalise the force of divinity itself. Neither in Homer nor in Hesiod do the gods create the universe: they do not even fully control fate or death.

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<sup>98</sup> Armstrong (1989) pp. 67ff.

Yet in Zeus, Homer provides a figure who most closely represents the primordial divinity (creative force), thereby registering an early movement from polytheism towards monotheism. The prologue to the *Iliad* expresses the god's intention to see many die in the Trojan conflict, at which time "the will of Zeus was accomplished" (*Il.* 1, 5). Zeus' exercise of justice, what is more, and as seen in respect of human transgression (*Il.* 16, 384-392) reveals a divinity whose exercise of power follows the cosmic pattern in which the balance of good and evil is the key to order in the natural world. Zeus sends a violent hurricane and waters (384f.) to wipe out the "decrees that are crooked" (387). As for Odysseus, his role is to restore social justice, *dike*, in his island kingdom, but it is by the favourable will of Zeus that he is able to overcome the many trials of his wanderings and return.<sup>99</sup>

It was the work of the later Presocratics to define the way in which the divine power related to the cosmos, as a divine and transcendent intellect: "mind alone, holy and beyond description, darting through the whole cosmos with swift thoughts",<sup>100</sup> or the primal 'One' of Parmenides. But we may detect a universal power behind the personification of a Zeus who can summon hurricanes to do his bidding.

## Mysteries

### *Eleusis*

The antiquity of the site at Eleusis, near Athens, has been dated by Mylonas<sup>101</sup> at approximately 1500, on the basis of a megaron building (identical with Mycenae's megaron B) and the continuity of worship there from Mycenaean times. This identification was challenged in the 1980's, but a recent survey by Cosmopoulos

<sup>99</sup> E.g. approaching Scheria: 5, 408-424; before the battle in the hall, 20, 41ff. and Zeus' favourable portents, 20, 98-121.

<sup>100</sup> *KRS* p. 312, fragment 397, Empedocles.

<sup>101</sup> Mylonas (1961) pp. 36-38. Kerényi (1967) pp. 20f.

reaffirms the attribution and suggests an early temple to Demeter in the megaron.<sup>102</sup> The site's name has been identified by the same scholar as having a possible connection to *eleusis*, 'arrival', or Elysion, realm of the blessed.<sup>103</sup> In either reading, Eleusis is confirmed as a centre of initiation to which the participant was required to travel, in expectation of a joyous enlightenment.

The mysteries are important to our understanding of original allegory and its interpretation. They merged myth (cult of Demeter) with solemn ritual and secrecy, as well as the active teaching of the inner sense of the *hiera* (sacred objects, of unknown character). In this respect, they preserve a tradition in which an outer form contains inner senses of a secret nature, reserved for the privileged.

There is, what is more, some connection to ecstatic religion in Minoan Crete and the practices documented for the Eleusinian and Dionysian rites. Evidence of grain cults in the great palace of Knossos in the presence, it is thought, of a 'goddess impersonator' seated on a throne close to the great magazines, needs to be taken into consideration in weighing the agrarian origins of the mysteries.<sup>104</sup>

Our primary evidence for the cult of Demeter derives from the eighth to seventh century *Homeric Hymn* to this goddess,<sup>105</sup> where she attributes her capture in Crete and transport to Eleusis to the work of pirates.<sup>106</sup> To this we add the (later) tradition of Diodorus that not only the Eleusinian and the Orphic mysteries, but also those of Samothrace and Thrace, came to the mainland from Knossos where they were practised openly since "ancient times".<sup>107</sup>

R. F. Willets adds linguistic evidence to the argument for a Cretan source, from the name 'Eileithyia' (Homer's goddess of childbirth, 19,188), for whom he identifies a

<sup>102</sup> Cosmopoulos (2003) pp. 1, 18ff.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 283.

<sup>104</sup> V, p. 48f.

<sup>105</sup> Trans. Cashford (2003) pp. 5-26.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 10. lines 120-125.

<sup>107</sup> Diodorus Siculus V, 77, 3 and V, 48, 49.

widespread cult in Crete of Neolithic origin.<sup>108</sup> As further proof, he evidences the Cretan month 'Eleusinos', which recalls mainland Eleusis as a place name. He also recognises similarities between the Minoan goddess and mainland Demeter.<sup>109</sup>

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* contains Demeter's own tale that she came from Crete across the sea.<sup>110</sup> She escaped her captors, and became the nurse of Demophoon, but incurred the wrath of his parents. Offended in her turn she brings disaster to the land and must be placated by the foundation of a temple and altar "above Kallichoron", where she initiates the mysteries.<sup>111</sup>

### ***The Odyssey in some Eleusinian perspectives***

Homer does not mention Eleusis, but refers to Eleusinian matters in *Od.* 5, 125-8, namely the sacred marriage of Demeter and Iasion in Crete; this is linked to the religious concept of the vegetation cycle by Willets.<sup>112</sup> The *Odyssey* (4, 561-570) has an Elysian Field, which Menelaos is destined to enjoy in the Afterlife.

Some literary and historical correspondences are enumerated briefly here, with the *Odyssey* material preceding the Eleusinian comparisons, which are italicised.

- The *Odyssey* names an "omphalos of all the waters," site of Kalypso's cave (1, 50).

*Eleusis, like Delphi, had an omphalos stone in the cave known as the Plutonion (entrance to the underworld).*<sup>113</sup>

- Odysseus' quest for enlightenment pursues a double, physical path, first into confusion before safe return to Ithaka.<sup>114</sup> *Nostos* is the major theme of the epic. The hero's wanderings have the style of a journey of initiation. Moreover, he was required to make a visit to Hades (though not a descent) as a condition of his continuing voyage.

<sup>108</sup> Willets (1958) pp. 222..

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. pp. 221f.

<sup>110</sup> Trans. Cashford, p. 10. lines 124-144.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. lines 270-274.

<sup>112</sup> Willets (1965) p. 133.

<sup>113</sup> Kerényi (1967) pp. 79f.159, figs. 48, 49.

<sup>114</sup> III, IV.

The *mystai*<sup>115</sup> processed from Athens to Eleusis and back again, a 'double journey' performed twice a year, in spring and early autumn. The process of initiation is therefore seasonally linked to the growth and harvesting of plants. The cycle of renewal is reiterated, implying hope of immortality.<sup>116</sup> The search for Persephone involves an underworld visit, and return.

- Odysseus hung on a fig tree on Charybdis (12, 432) before falling into the sea and being swept on to the shores of Scheria, where his trials ended. Many other trees mark turning points in the *Odyssey*.

The location of the rape of Kore by Hades (H.H. Demeter, 15-21) is remembered as taking place near the river Kephisos, near Eleusis. It is called Erineos from the wild fig that grew there.<sup>117</sup> Kerényi tells us that the fig tree indicated an underworld opening, and not only at Eleusis.<sup>118</sup>

The *mystai* celebrate, at various times, three different underworld entrances: at the fig tree, at the well where Demeter mourned her lost daughter, and on a rock in a hollow of the mountain.<sup>119</sup>

- As part of a series of rebirth images, Odysseus is 'reborn' on Scheria out of the seed of fire which lies between the entwined olive trees.<sup>120</sup> The association of light, and sun, with 'life' and possibly, return, is a Homeric theme.<sup>121</sup>

At the climax of the ceremonies at Eleusis, the hierophant proclaims, in fire, the birth of a son to the Queen of the Dead.<sup>122</sup>

- The *Odyssey*, in my interpretation, refers to divinity through the medium of specific objects having both mundane values and likely cryptic importance: the olive tree bed, the sceptre of Agamemnon, the Cave of the Nymphs, etc.<sup>123</sup>

A display of sacred objects (*deiknumena*) took place on the sixth day of the Eleusinian rites, the day of initiation. The Hierophant charged with the task was the most important priest in the cult. It is possibly significant that the showing of sacred objects (possibly small Mycenaean relics)<sup>124</sup> occurred at the termination of the ceremonies, when the *mystai* had concluded the passage to enlightenment which enabled them to grasp the inner sense of the objects as symbols.

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<sup>115</sup> 'Initiates'. Kerényi (1967) pp. 45ff. and note 3, p. 196, traces the etymology of *myeō*, or *muō* ('to close') to a possible origin in Mycenaean Greek, where it could have implied initiation or enthronement.

<sup>116</sup> Nilsson (1940) p. 6.

<sup>117</sup> Mylonas (1961) p. 246. Pausanias I, 38, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Kerényi (1967) p. 36, note 30.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. pp. 38f. Appendices 1 and 2: Tree, water source (or omphaloid well-structure), rocks and hollow mountains, all appear as *omphaloi* in the iconography of the axis.

<sup>120</sup> IV, pp. 35-36.

<sup>121</sup> Frame (1978).

<sup>122</sup> Kerényi (1967) pp. 82, 92].

<sup>123</sup> III.

<sup>124</sup> Brisson (2004) p. 60.



Whilst these correspondences do not establish a direct connection with the epic narrative, they do at a minimum imply a common culture in which pilgrimage and initiation were associated with spiritual transformation. Also, the particular symbolism which establishes *tree, rock and fountain* as markers of that transformative journey is nigh-on universal, and for this reason, the secret rituals of Eleusis may be thought to embody a lost tradition related in some way to Homer's coded text.

### ***Orphic cosmogonies***

The Orphic tradition can similarly offer some illumination to Homer's methods and motivation. A body of literature known as the *Orphic Hymns* was named for the singer, Orpheus – either a mythical or real individual- whose cult is attested from the sixth century, but the true age and origin of this mystery religion is not known. Diodorus Siculus places him (or his cult) in the fourteenth century BC,<sup>125</sup> but Orphism has until recently been considered a Hellenistic movement.

The recently discovered Hipponion tablet<sup>126</sup> and the Derveni Papyrus,<sup>127</sup> (to be discussed) contain written material on spiritual and cosmogonic matters which now situate some developed Orphic practice in the early 400's BC, or possibly in the sixth century.<sup>128</sup> Most notably, there is an association between the fate of the soul after death and matters cosmogonic which was not expressed by the initiates of Eleusis.<sup>129</sup>

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As Orphism is now being given an earlier attribution, it may help (albeit still retroactively) to indicate some points of correspondence.

<sup>125</sup> *Library* I, 23; I, 96; III, 65; IV, 25.

<sup>126</sup> *KRS* pp. 29ff.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 30-33.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.* p. 33.

Some Orphic features are given with parallel Odyssean episodes, *italicised*:

- a descent to the Underworld: *the two Nekyia*.
- stages in the journey marked by ‘guardians’: *Circe and Kalypso*.
- a tree as a marker of regeneration: *a fig on Charybdis, an olive on the shores of Ithaca, and another in the bedchamber*.
- self-identification as a ‘password’: *Cyclops, Scheria, etc.*
- ‘Mind, *Nous*,’ linked to Kronos, as the primordial mover: *nous, the agent of Odysseus’ return*.

Orphism (and later, the Dionysian mystery) advanced a concept of the death and resurrection of the ‘pure’ soul through rebirth which reached the Greek world in traceable textual tradition.<sup>130</sup> These are not ideas made explicit in the Homeric texts, but a concern with immortality and spiritual renewal is to be treated as one of the themes concealed in the encoded subtext of the *Odyssey*.

The thin gold Orphic plates (5<sup>th</sup>. century BC to the 3<sup>rd</sup>. century AD), found in graves in Crete, Greece and Italy, carry instructions to the dead. That from Hipponion in Southern Italy, c. 400 BC, begins with advice to the dead woman to declare herself “the son of Earth and starry sky”. This claim to be of divine descent, as it were of primordial *genos*, acts in the manner of a password to the next world on the strength of kinship with the gods. It could also be the marker of an initiate in the Greek mysteries, for it occurs in several gold tablets found in Greece.<sup>131</sup>

An early record of the Orphic cosmogony was preserved in a document now known as the Derveni Papyrus [henceforward *DP*].<sup>132</sup> There, a commentator reviews a pre-existent text which he maintains is allegorical. In the papyrus, ‘Mind’, *nous*, is identified with Kronos. As “the sun was being separated and isolated in the centre, [Mind] fixed

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>131</sup> B1, B2, and B9. Edmonds (2004) pp. 78f.

<sup>132</sup> Brisson (2004) p. 33: the theogonic material may date to the fifth or sixth centuries.

both the elements above the sun and those below and held them fast”.<sup>133</sup> This is a heliocentric cosmogony with a binding force directly linking ‘above’ and ‘below,’ and motivated by an anthropomorphised form of the primal intelligence.

The original text is *ainigmatōdes* and subject to riddles, the Derveni commentator tells us:

“And the true nature of the words cannot be said even though they are spoken. The poem is an alien one and riddling for human beings. But Orpheus intended by means of it to say not contentious riddles, but rather great things in riddles. Indeed, he is uttering a holy discourse...”<sup>134</sup>

*DP VII, 7-9. Laks and Most (1997) p. 12.*

He unwraps one startling metaphor in explication of *DP XIII, 27-30*:

“Seeing that men believe the source of life to be the genitals, and without them it does not occur, he used this word, likening Helios to the genital (*to aidōion*)”.

*Ibid pp. 14f.*

This is an example of forms and functions which mingle associatively. Both objects provide metaphors for life: therefore one may represent the other, with the “shameful one” (*phallos*) equal to the linear fall of sunlight. This, admittedly extreme example, I call an ‘accommodating’ symbol in which our perception of each referent undergoes an adjustment to allow the match to take place.

Our commentator appears to be both the explicator and the author of allegory in this very special context, and may be demonstrating something of the Homeric skill in metaphor, finding and using a set of concealed meanings of mystical character, through explicit ‘connections’.

### ***Mystery, Magic and Prophecy***

Mankind has long found auguries and portents in the natural world.<sup>135</sup> Dreams, the flight of birds, oracular utterance, weather omens or the ‘reading’ of animal body parts

<sup>133</sup> *DP* columns XIV-XV, in Laks and Most (1997) pp. 15f.

<sup>134</sup> *DP VII, 5. Ibid. p. 12.*

<sup>135</sup> West (1997) 46-51; 185f. Kingsley (1995) p. 218.

were all fit matter for the study by priests in the service of kings, as much as by the common man; soothsayers, diviners, sorcerers could earn their living by claiming mantic knowledge. Therefore, if such ‘hidden meanings’ were actively pursued and trusted by a significant majority, we can speak of an archaic mindset wherein symbolism, broadly defined as the study or use of an object or appearance potentially endowed with secondary significance, could flourish.

Struck makes a case for randomness or incongruity as “the ultrasignificant language of the divine.”<sup>136</sup> Far from being deterred by illogical nonsense, early man apparently found significance where none seemed likely. Much as it goes against the grain of modern thought, *nonsense*, in this definition, apparently *conveys metaphysical sense*.

Peter Kingsley declares a need for a broadening of perspective, away from ‘Socratic rationality’ and towards an unprejudiced appreciation of the Presocratics in their own historical context. Thus, for Empedocles, the so-called ‘magician’ who claimed to be immortal, Kingsley proposes a *real* magic consisting of a deep knowledge of the cosmos and the workings of nature. The emphasis is on knowledge that enables and heals, for when the philosopher transmits his learning in poetic form the words themselves have the power to change the listener, “taking root ...transforming not just his vision but his being”.<sup>137</sup>

The Delphic tradition also records many instances of riddling utterance that met the supplicant’s question with an enigmatic answer.<sup>138</sup>

We must therefore consider that if Homer does not always make his innermost beliefs outwardly plain, as one might expect from a master of poetic narrative, he does so by design, and possibly within a received tradition traceable in comparable form in widespread esoteric cults.

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<sup>136</sup> Struck (2004) p. 95.

<sup>136</sup> Kingsley (1995) pp. 2-5, 301.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 230.

<sup>138</sup> Fontenrose (1978).

*Early Cosmogonic Myths*

Since *kosmos* was initially 'decoration' or 'order,' and only subsequently the exclusive order of the universe (a physical entity), the workings of divine cosmic order could only be explored mythically, that is, metaphorically, through a combination of abstract and physical parallels- particularly those of the earth, sky and underworld, which exist within the orderly pattern of nature. In this way the physical world provided a model for the ultimate construction of a metaphysic in which such notions as the Afterlife could be discussed. But first the workings of either order have to be grasped by the ordinary individual, and it is myth which provides a mediating genre for the growth of personal understanding. For myths structure reality for us, and explain our present condition by means of a relation of history going back to the first time, the primordial moment from which the gods emerged and began to shape the world. The symbolism inherent in myth should conceivably lead us back via the concrete forms such as those of the celestial model, to the essence of the metaphysical abstraction.

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We know so little of Mycenaean mythology; crucially, says Kirk, we know nothing of the point at which it was "adulterated by reason".<sup>139</sup> Kirk's view of Greek myth attributes a *rationalising* process even to Hesiod's mythography ("personification, allegory...fable, literal association," etc.) which long predated the author of the *Theogony*: perhaps by "thousands of years".<sup>140</sup> Other scholars, as we have seen, make a less rigid distinction between *mythos* and *logos*, preferring to redefine both forms in a manner which creates 'a logic of myth'.<sup>141</sup>

Hesiod and Homer represent for Kirk the end of a long period of evolution in mythic forms and character, not altered until *logos* complemented *mythos*, with Plato in

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<sup>139</sup> Kirk (1970) p. 241.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> E.g. Struck and Kingsley.

the fourth century.<sup>142</sup> If we accept this very early attribution of Kirk's, or even the more fundamental revisions of Struck and Kingsley, a wide field of pre-Homeric myth formation is hypothetically existent. In addition, the idea of a rationalising Homer postulates a controlling, rather than (or, as well as) an intuitive intelligence.<sup>143</sup>

There appears to be a blurring of the rigid distinction which formerly differentiated myth from reason. This allows the possibility that our poet was working within a received oral tradition, whilst at the same time bringing to his performance the skills in structuring which required anticipatory organisation.



It remains now to situate Homer's cosmic structure within the format of known cosmological systems, before proceeding to describe his individual cosmic symbols.

### *Egypt and Mesopotamia*

Water as the creative impulse finds parallel expression in the earliest creation legends formulated in the great religious sanctuaries of **Egypt**,<sup>144</sup> where surviving texts [PT] from pyramid walls of the mid-third millennium characterise the chaotic primeval inundations of the 'first time' as the god, Nun.<sup>145</sup> (The foundation of this idea probably lies in observation of the fertilising power of the annual flooding of the Nile). In spite of further personifications of Nun as Atum, and Re (occasionally his son), he appears also as a *principle*, for the Pharaoh-king Pepi is recorded as born *in* Nun- "when heaven existed not, and earth existed not..."<sup>146</sup>

Water as the Creator, Ptah or Atum, engenders form out of his own substance. In the cosmogony of Heliopolis, Ptah becomes the initial progenitor of succeeding divinities.

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid. pp. 241, 249.

<sup>143</sup> Footnote II, 1, *supra* p. 2.

<sup>144</sup> Burkert (2005) p. 7: a "speculative cosmogony...reflection tries to grasp the universe."

<sup>145</sup> PT 1040 a-d.

<sup>146</sup> Brandon (1963) p. 16.

Among these are eight divine creatures, four of each gender and respectively either snake-headed or frog-headed, and their mythic existence too may have been the outcome of observation of valley flooding. They are clearly water creatures, and their importance in the cosmogony of Hermopolis was such that the city also bore the name ‘eight’, Chmunu.<sup>147</sup> The cosmic egg is laid by one such water being: “O Egg of the water, source of the earth, product (eggshell) of the Eight...”<sup>148</sup> From the same period comes a salutation to the sun god: “Thou art ascended on high, (coming forth) from the secret egg, as the child of the Eight!”<sup>149</sup> The importance of ‘Eight’ may (I speculate) relate to the totality of the four quarters of the earth and their solstice divisions.

Nun / Atum, “he who exists of himself” could be named also the ‘Hill’ that grew out of the primordial waters, as well as the *bn*-bird (var. *benu*) that sat on the ben-stone (capstone of the *ben-ben* obelisk) in the House (sanctuary).<sup>150</sup> There is a symbolic nexus here which plays upon associations with height such as hill, bird, or top of the pillar, the net effect of which is to portray the anthropomorphic figure as ‘he who rises from the earth or from the waters’.

The following line (1652c) speaks of Atum “spitting” out “that which was, as Shu” (air) and a female counterpart, Tefnet. The genealogy of creation unfolds from these two with Geb (earth) and Nut (sky). The sequence is broadly therefore Water-Air-Earth-Sky, into which we must intercalate the sequence of other biological forms: Man / Divinity, the Egg, and the Ogdoad (eight) of water creatures which are all related in some way to the watery principle. The overlapping imagery suggests a pre-existence or containment for these latter forms *in the originating substance*. This is relevant to early Greek definitions of ‘beginnings’, to which I shall return.<sup>151</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Brandon, *ibid.* p. 43.

<sup>148</sup> Quoted by Brandon, *ibid.* p. 44, from a magical papyrus of the New Kingdom.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* p. 45.

<sup>150</sup> *PT.* 1652 a-b. Brandon, *ibid.* pp. 18-19, note 1, p. 19.

<sup>151</sup> **III**, pp. 2-8.

The closest parallels to the Orphic texts lie with the **Mesopotamian** creation myths of the second millennium, the *Enuma Elish* and *Atraharsis*.<sup>152</sup> Burkert explains the syncretism of image, mythical tales, ritual practice and magic which creates intertwining in the myths, “connecting threads”.<sup>153</sup> Whatever the genre or format, the driving principle is the recreation of that order which underlies the balanced cosmos. By the recreation or imitation of that order, sickness can be cured and society kept in prosperity and peace.<sup>154</sup>

On account perhaps of the great rivers Tigris and Euphrates, the Mesopotamian cosmogony also imagines water as the primordial chaos. At the north end of the Persian Gulf where the Sumerian civilisation had laid the foundation for later Mesopotamian culture, the Sumerian language remained the privileged language of ritual for Babylonians and Assyrians alike. So we look first to the Sumerian goddess Nammu, who is said to have given birth to heaven and earth and all the gods. She is associated with the sea and with fresh water. Her ability to ‘generate earth’ may reflect the silting of rivers, or the formation of reed mats in the marshes.

Other, sweet, waters under the earth came to be mythologised as a male god Enki, who also represents wisdom.<sup>155</sup> He arrived by sea at the beginning of time. The barren land he found there was marked by a single carob tree which is named as “the tree unique” (though whether unique means ‘singular’ or ‘exceptional’ is hard to say).<sup>156</sup> The water which Enki brings to the paradise Dilmun, where there is no sickness, old age or death, promotes the fertility of the fields. Enki provides fruits, eight deities and eight

<sup>152</sup> Burkert, *Orientalizing* p. 126. Burkert *BMP* pp. 29-32 notes the resemblance of these same texts to some notable elements of Iliadic cosmology.

<sup>153</sup> Burkert, *Orientalizing* p. 124.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>155</sup> Brandon (1963) p. 84.

<sup>156</sup> Brandon, *ibid.* p. 73.



plants.<sup>157</sup> He builds his temple at Eridu, raising the city from the abyss and making it float on the water like a tall mountain. It is a clean place, a good place, of silver and adorned with lapis lazuli.<sup>158</sup>

Here the cosmogonic process is defined by the union of salt and fresh water, in the persons, firstly, of a 'generating goddess', and secondly of a male associated with wisdom, fertility and a paradisaal land marked (before his arrival) *by a single tree*. In establishing civilisation in the land, Enki raises a great city which retains its link to the abyss, whilst rising mountainously. This is a cluster of concrete images which bind the leading features of the connecting axis in a containing narrative, again associated with the number eight.

The epic tale *Enuma elish* tells of the creation of the world by Marduk who has to overcome a monster of the deep, Tiamat. The 'sea-being' mingles her waters with those of "primordial Apsu", the sweet waters. Theirs is a union akin to marriage and their commingling of waters generates a genealogy of male and female gods. Tiamat proves to be a violent force when she seeks to avenge the death of her husband with the help of demons and serpents, but she cannot withstand the might of Marduk, who crushes her and splits her in half like a shellfish. One half forms the sky.<sup>159</sup>

Marduk was assisted by the four winds in his battle with the cosmic monster:

"He netted a net, a snare for Tiamat; the winds from their quarters held it, south wind, north, east wind, west, and no part of Tiamat could escape". The rhythmic formulation has an incantatory appeal. If, moreover, Tiamat is held foursquare, she must be at a centre. (There will be occasion to return to four winds in a Homeric context).<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid. p. 75.

<sup>158</sup> Kramer (1944) pp. 62f.

<sup>159</sup> Trans. as *The Babylonian Creation*, by Sandars, pp. 90f. Tablet IV, II. 128-140.

<sup>160</sup> IV, pp. 32f.

So here we have the sky at least (and perhaps the earth, though it is not stated) formed from the waters of the sea. Like Homer's Tethys, Tiamat is "the first begetter".<sup>161</sup>

The Mesopotamian tradition provides in a western context some of the clearest symbolisation of the cosmogonic order and its importance in the affairs of man. From late in the third millennium, the city and the empire were presented as analogues of cosmic geography, so that the king could be celebrated as the "King of the Four Quarters"<sup>162</sup> and his city, as lying "in the midst" of the cosmos.<sup>163</sup> In Mesopotamian thinking the earthly spatial order matches cosmic spatial order because both reflect the single stream of divinely ordered being which flows through both. As long as the primordial moment of that system is periodically renewed (in, for example, New Year ceremonies) then universal order and well-being are maintained with the state ordered as cosmos, and *vice versa*. The nucleus of the bond requires a symbol, and that symbol is most commonly known under the Greek title, *omphalos*.<sup>164</sup> It is an image which proved "adaptable to every empirical situation".<sup>165</sup>

### **Footnote**

A 'symbolising' Homer has little part in established modern scholarship, but Homer as a creator of structures and patterns is given serious consideration. The evidence of mystery religions, and an argument for a different, pre-logical order of mythical thinking, together create a context in which cryptic utterance - relative to a divine presence in 'silent' nature - could conceivably find poetic expression in oral performance.

<sup>161</sup> *Enuma Elish*, Tablet I, line 4. Sandars, *ibid.* p. 73.

<sup>162</sup> Voegelin (1956) p. 24f.

<sup>163</sup> *Code of Hammurabi*, preamble, lines 3-4. Voegelin, *ibid.* pp. 24f.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* p. 27.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

It is proposed that the originality of Homer is in no way compromised by projected influences or inherited narrative tradition; Homer the man would be of his time, yet Homer the artist would transcend it.

The literary and archaeological records are beginning to indicate a level of cross-fertilising contact which justifies the careful use here of comparanda. The study will focus on symbolic language and iconography.

But in view of the paucity of connecting evidence, the search for the origins of Homer's cosmology must focus on primary evidence of the text, in one case, and material culture of the Bronze Age in the other, as *separately identified in their distinct contexts*. We shall proceed on the basis that that both fields function at a symbolic level which will eventually yield to a decoding of correspondences.

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### ***Section Three: Homer's Symbolic Cosmology***

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### *Interpreting Homer's cosmology*

**"There is almost nothing in Homer that can reasonably be construed as specifically cosmogonical or cosmological in content; that is, as going beyond the accepted outline of what has been termed the popular world-picture".<sup>1</sup>**

Kirk, Raven and Schofield have presented us with a substantial challenge. I focus on a single aspect of this enormous subject: poets' descriptions of the original condition, an object, a space or a force, or some ultimate antecedent to the primordial couple. Our own logic suggests there has to be a single start point from which *any* form of duality differentiates. As this is to be the prime object of the present search, I begin with Hesiod and his definition, as I see it, of the Centre of the World.

#### *Hesiod's 'chaos'*

**Hesiod** claims privileged reception of the *truth* of 'past, present and future', when the Muses speak to him on Mt. Helicon and place a staff on laurel in his hands (*Theogony* 21-23, 29, 30-32).

He begins his account of primordial time *ex arches* [116], with *Chaos*.

"Tell me these things, Olympian Muses, tell  
from the beginning,  
Which first came to be?  
Chaos was first of all, but next appeared  
Broad bosomed Earth"... *Theogony*, 114-117.

"From Chaos came black Night and Erebus.  
And Night in turn gave birth to Day and Space"... Ibid. 124f.<sup>2</sup>

As the principle of cosmic order in all its ultimate forms, *chaos* is an appropriately abstract, formless entity.<sup>3</sup> Not necessarily to be understood as an antithesis to order, chaos can be a sacred power essential to the creative process.<sup>4</sup> The etymology may

<sup>1</sup> KRS p.14.

<sup>2</sup> *Theogony*, trans. Wender p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> Hesiod did not invent it: KRS p. 35f. "A synthesis of at least two earlier variant accounts".

<sup>4</sup> Cornford (1952) pp. 194f. and notes.

reflect Proto-Indo-European *ghn, ghen* (gape, be wide open; cf. Old Norse *Ginnungap*),<sup>5</sup> or a correlation may be found with Sanskrit *kha*.<sup>6</sup> Among the many applications of the term *kha* are the mathematical: ‘infinity’, that is, all numbers, or ‘potentiality’. In conceptual terms, *kha* is the place where all things are shut up within, with their ends and beginnings.<sup>7</sup> Bussanich<sup>8</sup> is one who sees an analogy between Indo-European *kha*, as explained by Coomaraswamy, whom he quotes, and Hesiodic *chaos*. Iconographically, however, *kha* signifies the centre of the wheel, the prime symbol of the Hindu cosmology. The characteristics of this centre where the wheel spokes meet, at the empty nave or ‘navel’ space, are *calm and stillness*, because no movement is possible there in the hollow interior.<sup>9</sup>

‘Chaos’ is said to have represented empty space, even into the sixth and fifth centuries BC.<sup>10</sup> An ‘emptiness’ with the potential to generate life seems a grave contradiction. But the Vedic cosmic pillar *Skambha* and Brahman, ‘Being’, like Hesiod’s ‘gap’, represent an entity existing *before form*: a total abstraction which is nevertheless the source of all life’s opposites. It has affinities with Anaximander’s ‘Infinite’.<sup>11</sup>

‘Calmness’ may also seem at odds with Hesiod’s lines 745 and 746, if we may reliably equate the “yawning mouth of hell” (742) of Tartarus, with Chaos itself.<sup>12</sup> (This last interpretation would rely upon *chasma* as a derivative of *chaos*).<sup>13</sup> Two unusual features of Hesiod’s *chasma* are its ‘cosmic’ depth which a man would take a year to descend, and its ‘windiness’: “Gust after savage gust would carry him / Now here, now there”.<sup>14</sup>

So there appears to be a contradiction with *kha*, in its function as the embodiment

<sup>5</sup> KRS p. 37.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Kha*.

<sup>7</sup> Bussanich (1983) p. 213, note 9. Coomaraswamy, *Kha* p. 490f.

<sup>8</sup> Bussanich, *ibid.* p. 214, note 9.

<sup>9</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Kha, passim*.

<sup>10</sup> Cornford (1952) p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> McEvelley (2002) pp. 32f.

<sup>12</sup> KRS p. 37. D. M. Johnson (1999) *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> KRS pp. 20, 24, note 1; West (1966) pp. 192f. *ad loc.* agrees the derivation.

<sup>14</sup> *Theogony* 744ff.

of calm. Yet we can postulate a combination of wind and calm which gives a calm centre in the midst of the conflicting or circulating winds, an 'eye of the storm' where the still and timeless lies within the conflicting forces of wild nature, just as the unmoving centre occupies the centre of the rotating wheel.

(Homer's "windy fig" before the watching point of Troy (*Il.* 22, 145-152) not far from the polarised well springs, hot and cold ('Two Paths'?)<sup>15</sup> would then also represent a calm unmoving centre, an axis-tree at the heart of circulating winds, an apt image in view of the path of the two heroes (or it may be seen as two paths of two runners) who "swept whirling about the city of Priam" (165). The episode contains the essential elements

*'fixed vertical point + two moving paths + oppositional factors (springs, enemies) + rotation'*

compounded into a dialogue which recreates the universal axial model. It would offer a counterpart to the "savage gusts" which blow *inside* the mouth of hell (hence encircling) in Hesiod's *Theogony*,<sup>16</sup> in an interior space where calm might appear more likely).

With Hesiod's triad Chaos, Eros and Gaia, the cycle of existence emerges via the interaction of the procreative energy (Eros) and the material foundation (Gaia, Earth; Ouranos, Sky) and successive generational dualities. But Hesiod has told us clearly that Chaos was *first*. Chaos cannot be a 'gap', since the word implies pre-existent forms to be separated, and we know that Chaos preceded all else. Therefore Eros and Gaia must in some sense be subsequent to Chaos.<sup>17</sup>

The reference to Chaos is too brief for any further analysis. Nor is it easy to establish the position of Chaos in respect of Tartarus, whether they may be discrete elements or not. Yet as a chasm leading into the ground, Chaos is fitted etymologically-

<sup>15</sup> These paths will be shown as an integral part of axis iconography. III, pp. 63f, *passim*.

<sup>16</sup> *Theogony* 742-746.

<sup>17</sup> Fontenrose (1959) pp. 212f., has Chaos as the parent of the others.

and conceptually- to be, in at least this instance, a chasm called Tartarus, or Tartarus may be a localised part of the chasm, an *omphalos* at the foot of the axis.

With this sense of their shared identity, one may consider “the ends and springs / Of gloomy earth and misty Tartarus” (738f. and 807f.) to be those equally of Chaos. “*Pegai kai peirata*”: an end is clearly a termination, and a spring is a source or beginning. Therefore the great chasm in the earth, or its deepest point, both *receives and gives out*.

<sup>18</sup> The importance to the poet of this element of ‘ebb and flow’ is underlined by the ring composition wherein lines 736-739 = 807-810 (according to Johnson, though it may be only line repetition). <sup>19</sup> A dual inward and outward flow *which is echoed in the very structure of the lines*, increases the sense of *dual pathways*, and provides a close parallel to the two doors of opposite movement of the Cave of the Nymphs in the *Odyssey*.<sup>20</sup>

Tartarus contains cyclical features such as Day and Night, Sleep and Death, which speak of the passage of Time, but since the result is a *coincidentia* of opposites, the place itself can be read as a timeless resolution of the two ways.

Here, moreover, stands Atlas (“Iapetos’ son”) holding up the broad heavens, at the point where Night and Day meet, greet each other, and cross the threshold. As Day goes out, Night comes in (752-754). Here is a further indication of *two-way movement* in the depths of the chasm, where the best-known god of the axis, Atlas, who is man, pillar and mountain, holds the centre ground and supports the skies (450f.). <sup>21</sup> The co-incidence of the day and night phases of the sun at a specified location (the threshold) establishes *a centre point with a vertical component*.

The problem of Atlas’ placement, whether he is at the gates of the Underworld (wherever they may be) or in the west, as for example in *Odyssey*, 1, 50-54, is a taxing

<sup>18</sup> Cf. V, figs. 36, 38; pp. 62, 63.

<sup>19</sup> D. M. Johnson (1999) pp. 8ff. Bussanich (1983) p. 216f.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the ‘Pit’ and the ‘Peak’ of the axis imagery associated with Pusan’s paths. Appendix 2, pp. 5-7.

<sup>21</sup> Hardie (1985). Ballabriga (1986) pp. 75-89.



one. It is a problem of directionality which will be tackled later.<sup>22</sup>

For the moment, let us suggest that Atlas holds up the sky in his capacity as an axis,<sup>23</sup> and that in addition, the axis traditionally roots itself in an underworld space (*omphalos*) such as those represented by Hesiod's deep chasm, his house of Day and Night, or the cave-habitation of the underground river, fresh water Styx with her "silver pillars reaching up to heaven" (776f.). In lines 805f. of the *Theogony*, "Ogygian" is used of the water of Styx "which never fails", as an adjective meaning 'primeval'.<sup>24</sup> This must be reconciled with any 'primeval' sense of Kalypso's omphaloid island, Ogygia, in the context of a wider cosmogony of primordial times or places.

What is more, that axis place can occur at any of the four sustaining axis-pillars which support the heavens,<sup>25</sup> whether on land or sea but probably at the edges of the world, as in the case of Kalypso's island, as I intend to show. For an axis as centre, being metaphysical, can be found anywhere in the phenomenal world.<sup>26</sup>

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### ***Homer: Okeanos***

Hesiod has given us a point of comparison and a means of assessing another poet's cosmology. **Homer** does not place any such principle as *chaos* in his (barely discernible) cosmogony. There is however one moment when the idea of a deep chasm allied to Tartaros appears in the *Iliad*.

Zeus threatens to cast his wayward gods

"down to the murk of Tartaros,  
far below, where the uttermost depth of the pit lies under  
earth, where there are gates of iron and a brazen doorstone..." *Il.* 8, 13-15.

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<sup>22</sup> IV, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Hardie (1985).

<sup>24</sup> Frame (1978) 166-169. Ballabriga (1986) pp. 92-95; p. 94: 'Ogygian / primeval' as an epithet relating to underground water and infernal beings.

<sup>25</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 12f.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Eliade, *Patterns*, pp. 374-379. Stokes (1962) p. 17, argues, "as a matter of common sense" that Tartarus is at the centre of the earth.

As in Hesiod's version, the depths contain the appurtenances of a house. Tartaros' position is indicated by Homer as the "uttermost" point of all, the "pit". There is a fair degree of correspondence between the two poets on this point, with Homer possibly clarifying aspects of Hesiod's chasm.<sup>27</sup>

Homer's 'ancestral couple' appear to be Okeanos and Tethys (*Il.* 14, 200f., cf. 14, 301-303). With no anteriority, we are left to decide the manner in which either or both anthropomorphisations can symbolise the primordial force or substance.

It is Okeanos who is the '*theon genesis*' or progenitor of the gods in the *Iliad* (14, 201) and may be credited with a primordial function which displaces Ouranos and Gaia. His position encircling the world implies a mystical contact or communication with the Otherworld, which lies beyond.

Now we know Okeanos to be a powerful, turbulent fresh water river encircling the earth.<sup>28</sup> The sun and the stars<sup>29</sup> plunge into the waters of Okeanos at night and re-emerge at dawn (*Il.* 8, 485). The sun is miraculously "washed" by this immersion (*Il.* 5, 5f.) therefore the encircling river has potency beyond the norm. It is when we come to investigate the legendary islands that lie in the course of Okeanos that this power becomes clear. On the Elysian Fields which harbour privileged individuals reprieved from Hades, it is the westerly breezes of Okeanos which refresh these islanders (*Od.* 4, 562-568). Again, the mystical 'edges of the world' are informing the narrative with details elsewhere proper to Olympus (cf. *Od.* 6, 42-46).

Is then the water of Okeanos the generational power we seek? This is the theory proposed by Rudhardt who identifies the great river as "*l'eau primordiale*". He cites the case of the Hesperides of Hesiod, which lie in the course of Ocean and enjoy an abundance of trees and "golden apples" in the *Theogony*, 215-217, which are comparable with Homer's Elysian Fields in this respect. Hesiod's Okeanos and Tethys

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pindar, *Nemean* 6, 3-4.

<sup>28</sup> *Il.* 3, 5; 14, 200f.; 16, 151; 18, 402f.; 18, 606f.; 21, 19ff.; *Od.* 10, 511.

<sup>29</sup> Apart from the Great Bear: *Il.* 18, 487ff.; *Od.* 5, 272-275.

are prolific in their parenthood, generating many rivers of both genders (337-363). They are responsible for the existence of a daughter, Styx “the most important one of all” (360f.), in whom one tenth of the holy Stream (Okeanos) flows underground (787f.) and “only this one / Flows from a rock” (792f.).

If, like Hesiod’s originating couple, Homer’s Okeanos and Tethys generate life-giving waters which spread through the surface and its underside (Hades), they are directly responsible for the perpetuating the life cycle of all biological forms, which would in my view be an adequate description of the primordial agent. We note that water was identified as such, by Thales, the earliest of the Greek physicists.<sup>30</sup>

Lastly, we have the Orphic *Hymn to Okeanos*, 83, which addresses Okeanos as the “*arche polou*” (line 7), translated by Rudhardt as “*le principe de la voûte celeste*”, or “principle of the celestial vault”. He admits the phrase is difficult to understand.<sup>31</sup> I suggest that a translation of *polos* as ‘axis of the sky’ enables us to see Okeanos as the source, or point of emergence, of a heaven-sustaining pillar;<sup>32</sup> in Thomas Taylor’s translation, “a friendly fountain”. In Orphic tradition at least,<sup>33</sup> Okeanos would seem to have a generative role via its association with the life-giving axis.

### ‘*Dios Apate*’

Returning to Kirk, Raven and Schofield: their statement above (III, p.2) was made in respect of the *Dios apate*, or Deception of Zeus (*Il.* 14, 153-360, and 15, 1-39) “and even in this episode there is not very much”, they say...and even that could be explained without cosmological interpretations. Nevertheless the passage had been taken seriously as cosmological theory by Plato (*Theaetatus* 152 E) and Aristotle

<sup>30</sup> KRS pp. 88-95.

<sup>31</sup> Rudhardt (1971) p. 79, note 9.

<sup>32</sup> V, pp. 65ff.

<sup>33</sup> The lateness of the evidence is acknowledged.

(*Metaphysica* A3983 b 27).<sup>34</sup>

An exception to this deficiency in cosmic reference, as explained by the scholars,<sup>35</sup> is the episode in *Iliad* 15, 189-93, where is recounted the division of the world into three planes ruled by Zeus, Hades and Poseidon respectively. “But earth and high Olympos are common to all three” (193).

The horizontal earth, the underworld and the heavens dissected by the vertical (Mt. Olympos) are indeed shared territory, but the mountain also provides a mediating route between the three, I interpret. One must presume that this and other brief examples in the note conform to “the popular world picture” as quoted above, and do not qualify as ‘early science’ in relation to the rational tradition. However ‘popular beliefs’ merit consideration in the present context, which is not focused on scientific accuracy, but literary and artistic imagination.

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The cosmic elements in the ‘Seduction’ passage amount chiefly to the identification, by Hera, of Tethys “the mother” and Okeanos the “origin of the gods” (*Il.* 14, 302) whom she expects to find “at the ends of the generous earth” (*Il.* 14, 301). She is the only divinity in the *Iliad* to travel to the *peirata gaies*, and as her journeying is repeated (14, 225 = 19,114), there may be ‘seasonal’ aspect to her movements.<sup>36</sup> The lady has an ulterior purpose- not as she claims to settle discord between the estranged gods, but to turn Zeus’ attention aside from his control of the Trojan war. She never does seem to achieve her goal, and one may suspect a didactic agenda to this narrative element. Homer intends perhaps to create a temporary biography in which the pair, in parallel with Okeanos and Tethys, become the embodiment of the creative waters,<sup>37</sup> possibly intended as a contrast to the waters of death, the River Styx, which strengthens

<sup>34</sup> KRS pp. 14f.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 14, and note 1.

<sup>36</sup> O’Brien (1993) pp. 179, 204.

<sup>37</sup> KRS p. 17, point to a Babylonian or Egyptian precedent. Also II, pp. 43f.

the queen's oath to her co-conspirator, Sleep (*Il.* 14, 271-274).

The seduction takes place neither in their home on Mount Olympos nor in the special chamber made for Hera by her son Hephaistos, but on the peaks of Phrygian Mt. Ida. The poet lingers on the details of Hera's chamber, the snug door leaves and the secret door bar that no other god could open (*Il.* 14, 166f. = 337ff.). This may be extraneous detail but again, the tenor is cryptic. Their love making is conducted instead on the Idaean mountain, and the ground bursts magically into flower beneath them with dewy clover, crocus and hyacinth, as they lie wrapped in a golden cloud (346-351).

Three motifs here, the 'artful chamber' (we may compare that of Odysseus); the 'flowery meadow' characteristic of Elysium,<sup>38</sup> and the 'bird' motif, so well developed in lines 290f.,<sup>39</sup> will each be discussed in these pages as items of cosmic iconography.

There is a witness to their *amours* who is granted a privileged seat high on a pine tree. This is no ordinary tree, but

“a towering pine tree, that one that grew tallest  
at that time on Ida, and broke through the close air to the aether.  
In this he sat, covered over and hidden by the pine branches,  
in the likeness of a singing bird whom in the mountains  
the immortal gods call chalkis, but men call him kymandis”. *Il.* 14. 286-291.

This “towering pine” has a twin in the heaven-seeking tree on Calypso's island.<sup>40</sup> Not only does the Iliadic version of the height and roots of the pine tree pierce and unite the planes of earth, heaven and (by implication) the underworld, but it is topped by the conventional companion of the World Tree, the bird, in this instance the night hawk. The personification of Sleep and the presence of the 'night bird' evoke Night as a cosmogonic principle; even Zeus is in fear of him (259ff.). Night in other cosmogonies is the generator of life<sup>41</sup> and even lies around the *chasma* in Hesiod's *Theogony*.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup> West (1978) p. 171; Nagy (1979) pp. 167f., 179. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 117f., 172f.: in the Golden Age of man the earth produces effortlessly, without interruption.

<sup>39</sup> Wensinck (1921).

<sup>40</sup> *Od.* 5, 239; cf. West (1971) p. 59. Bakker (2001) p. 345.

<sup>41</sup> *KRS* pp. 17-20.

<sup>42</sup> *Theogony*, 124.

Night may even have been “a local [form] of the original *chaos*”.<sup>43</sup> Allied with an image in which several points of comparison match the axis iconography (bird,<sup>44</sup> tree, height, three planes, mountain, dew / water, abundant flora) this can be seen as a sustained cosmological reference.<sup>45</sup>

Burkert<sup>46</sup> indicates the resemblance in character and etymology of Homer’s little-known Tethys, and Tiamat, who ‘is’ the salt sea in the Babylonian Creation epic, *Enuma Elish*. It is from the divided body of Tiamat that Marduk creates heaven and earth. The same scholar sees the oath of Hera made by the River in the name of the “wide heaven” and “dripping water of the Styx” where Earth acts as witness (*Il.* 15, 34-38) as an equivalent of the *cosmic* oath in the name of the planes of existence, identified as of eastern origin.<sup>47</sup>

Considering that Babylonian cosmology evolved well in advance of the Greek astronomical sciences there could well have been an eastern route of transmission for this or other mythic cosmology found in the pages of Homer.

### ***Omphalos and Pole of the Chariot***

But now, the simplest question of all: does Homer refer *directly* to the axis or *omphalos*? Not, I believe, to the axis, though indirect references abound. The *omphalos* appears in several contexts as the bodily navel, stud, or the central boss on a shield. In book 11, 35 of the *Iliad* (*aristeia* of Agamemnon), the boss is of dark cobalt and lies in “the very centre”. The *Odyssey*’s enigmatic “navel (*omphalos*) of all the waters” (1, 50) raises further issues of embedded metaphor.

The linguistic development of *omphalos* given by Liddell, Scott and Jones embraces

<sup>43</sup> KRS p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Il.* 7, 59-62.

<sup>45</sup> O’Brien (1993) p. 38, n. 57, the Idaean pine as “tree of life”; p. 175f., “merging with the tree imagery”, p. 181.

<sup>46</sup> Burkert, *BMP* pp. 30f. Also West, *East* pp. 147f.

<sup>47</sup> Burkert, *BMP* p. 32.

the following range:

- a navel;
- anything having a navel shape;
- the centre or middle point, as at Delphi, “middle point of Earth”;
- an altar;
- a vault or tomb;
- seed vessel, fruit;
- keystone of an arch;
- centre of an army where it parts into two wings.

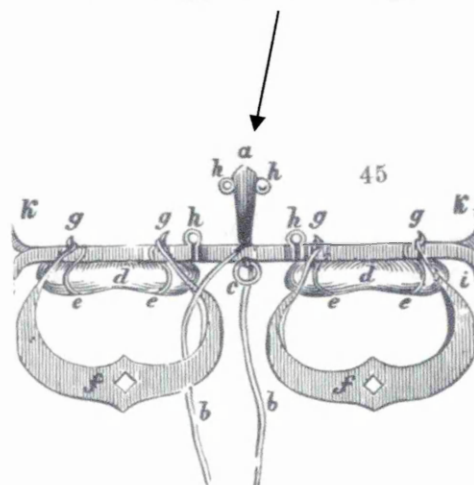
Notions of new life and centrality but also *middle*, and *expansion into two complementary parts* at some time became embedded in the totality of the *omphalos* metaphor (of unknown antiquity).

Another use of the *omphalos*-noun in the *Iliad* arises in the context of a chariot of great significance, the mule cart which Priam takes to recover the body of his son Hektor, with the guidance of Hermes (24, 265-274; *omphalos* in lines 269, 273). The episode has potential cosmic value.

Lattimore translates as “knob” or “horn” the *omphalos* of the equine chariot harness. When we examine the cut provided by Autenrieth, which is a reconstruction of a chariot yoke or crossbar “combined from ancient representations”, and where *a* marks the *omphalos*, we have to ask why *omphalos* was appropriate Homeric terminology for this small item. A concealed metaphor of possible cosmic application emerges from the terminology.<sup>48</sup>

Fig. III, 1.

Autenrieth (1958)  
Cut no. 45. p. 128.



<sup>48</sup> ‘Horn’ at some point becomes an established astrological metaphor. Cf. Aratus (3<sup>rd</sup>. century BC) *Phaenomena* 566, uses ‘horn,’ ‘cheraon’, for eastern and western arcs of the horizon, Chadwick (1958) p. 120, links *cheraos* ‘having horns’ to Linear B *Ke-ra-ja-pi* (KN Sd 0401). Cf. *Theogony* 789, *keras* as a branch of Ocean.

The prominent 'horn' piece lies centrally, between two head collars, and vertically in respect of the yoke bar; two reins meet here. Two further illustrations show the *omphalos* of the yoke lying at the central point where the pole meets the crossbar above the horses' shoulders.

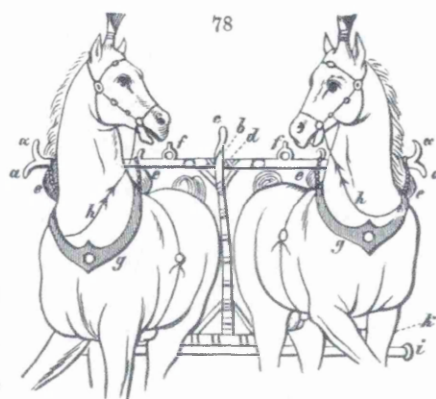


Fig. III, 2.

Autenrieth (1958)  
Cut no. 78, p. 176.

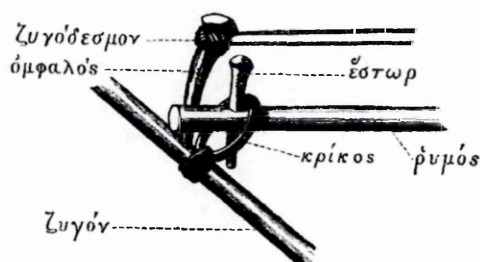


Fig. III, 2A

Leaf (1884), fig. 3. p. 189.

The configuration therefore corresponds to the following tripartite pattern:

'Single pole [= axis?] between two reins, two collars and two horses [= Two Paths?] meets 'horn' [= *omphalos*]... to create a Centre'.

The whole assemblage thereby takes on the aspect of 'cosmic machinery' under divine propulsion through the central axis (*polos*)<sup>49</sup> to a joining point at the *omphalos*.

<sup>49</sup> *Polos* is not used by Homer. Cf. V, pp. 65ff.



### ***Part I: The Axis***

A group of objects which “mediate between the *axis* [*mundi*] and the bed [of Odysseus]” has been identified by Michael Nagler as a thematic series.<sup>50</sup> The archetypal symbol, he claims, (the *axis*) is reiterated not only in the bed, but in the mast, loom, the pear tree in Eumaios’ wall and the tall pine on Kalypso’s island. Most distinctive is the pillar where Penelope is found leaning (“suggestively associated”)<sup>51</sup> in four separate episodes. Together, it is said, “they furnish a smooth and exactly calibrated symbolic modulation from the exotic world to the center of the *oikos*”. Interpreting his “exotic” as ‘outer’<sup>52</sup> or ‘external,’ I read Nagler to imply a Homeric connection between a divine centre and an earthly one, linked by the axial phenomenon in sundry forms. The author speaks of a “resonance” between a primordial axis and its shadow-images. This I believe is justified by the emphasis,<sup>53</sup> (in four locations) naming the bed as a great *sema*, and the same number of repetitions<sup>54</sup> of ‘Penelope-with-pillar.’

With Nagler’s theory in mind, we begin with an exploration of accommodations of the sacred tree and the cosmic pillar in their earliest traceable forms in Greek tradition, before proceeding to textual analysis.

### ***Tree Worship***

The shaman’s drum and drumstick are traditionally taken from a forest tree previously determined by divination to be a ‘World Tree’.<sup>55</sup> With this miniature of the World Axis he can create the ‘magical music’ that carries him away on his ‘horse’,<sup>56</sup> and by reaching the Centre of the World, perform his work of divination and healing.

But there is no need to rely on shamanism alone for an explanation of the sacrality

<sup>50</sup> Nagler (1996) pp. 153f.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Cf. use of ‘outer world’ p. 160, paragraph 2.

<sup>53</sup> 23, 188, 202, 206, 225f.

<sup>54</sup> III, pp. 40f.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Eliade, *Shamanism* p. 40n. 168ff.

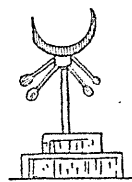
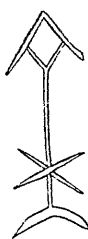
<sup>56</sup> Ibid. pp. 173f., 233, 407.

of trees and wooden implements. The practice of tree worship is ancient and universal, and the conversion of wood from sacred trees is attested in antiquity by the fashioning of the *xoanon* (wooden statue) <sup>57</sup> or the *ashera* (pole or living tree, set beside the altar in Canaa and Syria) from such sources.

The ancient importance of the tree can be reckoned from the preservation of stylised tree symbols appearing in the oldest Chaldean (Sumerian) and Assyrian cylinder seals (III, 3) each of which shows a connection to four 'emanations' (rivers or directions?) which may identify the tree as central.

Fig. III, 3.

Rudimentary forms of the sacred tree, from Chaldaean and Assyrian cylinders. Goblet d'Alviella (1894) pp. 119. figs. 61a, d; 62, b.



### *The Oak at Dodona*

In Greece, likewise, the tree itself was worshipped early as the shrine of a divinity enclosed within it: <sup>58</sup> witness Zeus 'endendros' <sup>59</sup> and the legend at Rhodes of 'Helen Dendritis'. <sup>60</sup> Odysseus consults the oak at Dodona (*Od.* 14, 327f.), and Hesiod adds that Zeus dwelt there in the trunk of the tree. <sup>61</sup>

The site at Dodona was believed to date to at least the 14<sup>th</sup>. century BC, and to have been founded by Pelasgians, the earliest people to occupy Greece. <sup>62</sup> Despite some Mycenaean remains, no tradition can confidently be projected further back than Homeric testimony. The tree is of interest however for the nature of the legends that

<sup>57</sup> Bötticher pp. 103, 229. West, *East* p. 33f.

<sup>58</sup> Farnell (1896) vol. 1. p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>60</sup> Pausanias 3. 19, 20. Hera is suggested as an early vegetation goddess in whom Minoan tree cult survived, by Nilsson (1932) p. 185.

<sup>61</sup> Scholiast on Sophocles, *Trachiniae* 1169. Later writers ascribed the oracular power of the oak of Dodona to roots which penetrated to Tartarus: e.g. Virgil, *Georgics* 2. 291.

<sup>62</sup> Strabo, *Geographia*, 5. 2. 5; 7. 7. 9.

accrue to it, some of which may be relevant to the wider tradition of sacred plants in Greece.

A tale that names water a 'fountain of the sun' is told of the sacred spring which emerges near the Dodonian oak. The water was said to grow cold at midday, to warm towards sunset, until becoming very hot again at midnight.<sup>63</sup> In other words, the water was following the four-part diurnal solar rhythm, but with a reversal / inversion of its fluctuating warmth. Here is a reflection of other strange phenomena which seem to occur at sacred places (associated, I believe, with the axial link), in the way of lost, invisible or distorted solar and lunar direction markers, such as absence of shadow, or here, unreal temperature. In each instance such oddities relate to the presence or absence of the sun.<sup>64</sup>

The sacred, oracular tree has to be understood in the context of early animism which saw tree spirits, demons or gods in natural forms. With increasing sophistication, the tree-god became anthropomorphised into a vegetation deity, so that Zeus could be variously the oak-god of Dodona, god of agriculture in Attica,<sup>65</sup> and in the course of time the greatest in the Olympian pantheon in Homeric tradition. Whilst the tree continues to be worshipped even today in some lands, the sense of a divine presence in the wood, branches, leaves and fruits is never far from mind; so we still 'touch wood' for luck.

The tale of the Argonautic voyage was known to Homer, so must be older (12, 69-72). There is also an Argonautic tradition of Athene which for Parke<sup>66</sup> at least, "must be as old as the *Odyssey*". During the construction of the Argo the goddess is said to have taken a segment of the holy oak of Dodona and inserted it into the prow of the

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<sup>63</sup> Cook, *Zeus* vol. 1. p. 368.

<sup>64</sup> III, p. 34f.

<sup>65</sup> Parke (1967) pp. 46-79.

<sup>66</sup> Parke (1967) p. 13.

Argo, giving the ship the power of prophetic speech.<sup>67</sup> This may be seen as an example of the transfer of magical power from nature to artefact.

‘The fruitful tree’ is known as a widespread, shamanistic image of the cosmic bond, ‘The Tree of Life’.<sup>68</sup> Sacred trees are, moreover, a notable feature of the cultic scenes in Aegean art. As will be shown, many of the artefacts to be described here as axial symbols, such as mast, sceptre, house- or bed-post, or loom, are derived from wood in which the material of their construction seems to perpetuate the magic and power of an original sacred tree.

### ***The Tree in Cult and Cosmic Metaphor***

The first twelve books of the *Odyssey* are concerned with the course and outcome of chaos and disorder, as much upon the raging seas and among inhospitable islanders as within the desecrated halls of the hero’s home on Ithaka. The reintegration of that society could only be achieved with the *nostos* of the master of the house and his resolution of a test of knowledge, the great *sema* of the olive tree bed. The hero’s recollection of the work of his own hands is part of that significant moment of homecoming. The prominence given to the tree at this seminal moment places the tree of *epic poetry*<sup>69</sup> in a situation of parallel prominence to that of the tree of *cosmic mythology*, and (as will be seen) the tree of *Aegean iconography*.

There is a precedent to this story of the tree and bed in a Sumerian<sup>70</sup> tale of Bilgamesh (=Gilgamesh). Inanna picks up a willow tree, *Huluppu*, which has been blown down by a storm. She plants it in her garden where it prospers, having not only a snake at its base and a thunderbird in its branches but a ‘Demon Maiden’ in residence.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Earliest attestations: Aeschylus, fr. 20 of a lost play; Philo Judaeus, 2, 468; Apollodorus. 1, 9. 16.

<sup>68</sup> Wensinck (1921) p. 22.

<sup>69</sup> West (1971) pp. 55-60: the Cosmic Tree in Near East and Greek tradition.

<sup>70</sup> Trans. George, Poem 5, pp. 175-195. George, p. 141: these Sumerian fragments are older than the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 180, lines 26-44.

But Inanna weeps, because she wishes to make a bed and a throne from the wood of the tree. Bilgamesh comes to the rescue of Inanna, disperses the tree's occupants and rips it up by its roots, then "To his holy sister Inanna, he gave wood for her throne / he gave wood for her bed".<sup>72</sup>

The presence of a snake in the chthonic position, the female spirit in the body of the tree, and the heavenly bird above, are sufficient to identify the three planes of the earth joined by the penetrating axis, and make this a *cosmic tree*. The manufacture of status furniture from the wood of such a sacred tree implies the transfer of some magical essence from the living tree to the artefact.

### *The Olive Tree*

That the *sema* of the tree in the *Odyssey* is equally great on the cosmic scale is evident in the accompanying details, which equate the bed pillar to the metaphors of the *axis mundi*, and the bed and bedroom to possible *omphaloi*.

- The tree chosen is sacred to Athene and may be thought to contain something of her spirit.
- It is enclosed in a chamber of close-set stones and sealed by tight-fitting doors (23, 192-4) to the implied exclusion of light, hence it is cavernous, omphaloid and chthonic.
- The presence of the god is indicated not only by the tree but also by the level of craftsmanship which is achieved, ostensibly by Odysseus, but to be credited like all highly skilled work to divine guidance.
- The bed's trappings are costly and regal ("gold and silver and ivory", 200) and as such imply not only worldly status but the durability and immutability of the pure metals.<sup>73</sup>
- The placement of the *tholos*-like enclosed chamber on the square or rectilinear courtyard places the image in the realm of sacred geometry, whose start point is 'the squaring of the circle'.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid p. 182f., lines 127-148.

<sup>73</sup> Clark (1986).

<sup>74</sup> Earth, square, is to be accommodated to the heavens, circular. Cosmic placement necessarily preceded major building operations. Cf. Lethaby (1994) pp. 62ff.: foundation stones, orientation to the eight cardinal points. Cf. Guénon, *FS* pp. 175-178. Cf. Lawlor (1982) pp. 74-79.

- This geometry moves into the third, vertical dimension with the introduction of the olive tree-post to which the *omphalos*-bed (container and generator of life) is so firmly attached.
- It could not be displaced; hence we know that its roots have a firm grasp on the earth's plane whereby they penetrate to the lower world. Above all it is a pillar: "*It was thick, like a column (kion)*" (191, my emphasis).<sup>75</sup>

The simile 'tree (like, or equal to) a pillar' carries an 'incongruity marker', since there is a considerable difference between the smooth and regular sides of a house column and the bark of an often-twisted, asymmetrical olive tree. In the narrative simile the organic tree merges with the architectural pillar, and just as the pillar (especially the kingpost) sustains the house, the olive tree sustains the marriage, and also the bonds which reinforce the society, together with justice and the order in the community.

When Odysseus reaches with his adze to plane the tree "from the roots up" (196) the image projected is a transfer to the sacred post of bodily energy, flowing in an upward direction.<sup>76</sup> He can be imagined as physically at one with the axis, like the Achilles of the *Iliad* who was capable of placing and closing, *alone*, the great door piece of the king's gate (*Il.* 24, 452-6). As to the uprightness of the tree, it has to be remembered that straightness<sup>77</sup> is otherworldly, for the true line is rarely witnessed in physical nature's circles, curves, or spirals of energy. Odysseus' bedpost "straight to a chalkline" (197) and those of the door jambs of his and others' workmanship are to be credited to the inspiration of a divine craftsman, an Athene or Hephaistos.<sup>78</sup> In any event, if the post is an axis, in metaphysical terms cannot be other than straight and 'true'.

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Following his magical return from the country of the Phaiakians the sleeping Odysseus is set down on the sand of his own island close to the tree sacred to Athene,

<sup>75</sup> *LSJ*: *kion* = house pillar, and a natural object, and (post-Homer) a gravestone. Wensinck (1921) p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Nagler (1996) p. 154: "raw vitality flows from the earth up".

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Trubshaw (1994).

<sup>78</sup> *Il.* 15, 410-12.

the olive growing in the bay of Phorkys near the Cave of the Nymphs (13, 116-125). This solitary tree standing at the boundary of sea and land, and close to a cave where fresh water flows and Two Paths are identified,<sup>79</sup> is sufficient to mark Ithaka as an island on the sacred axis, with all that is thereby implied in terms of divine favours. Here, by the tree and the adjacent cave (*omphalos* element) the sailors deposit the treasures brought home by Odysseus, “next to the trunk of the olive” (13, 122), most probably in contact, as a place of safety in line with the location subsequently chosen by Athene, the cave.<sup>80</sup> Then it is time for them to sit “*against* the trunk of the hallowed olive” (372, my italics), and this is where Odysseus receives the kindly compliments and counsels which will guide him towards the destruction of the suitors. The tree serves as a place of instruction and enlightenment,<sup>81</sup> as well as the location of a divine epiphany. Nowhere in the epic is the identity of the goddess and her tree made more explicit, here at the turning point of the twenty four books, on the geographical island dominated by its sharp peaks or pillar-like mountains.<sup>82</sup>

### ***The Fig Tree***

Another tree of equal fertility and ritual significance to the olive, “a great fig” (12, 103) flourishes on the rock named Charybdis, where the waters of the whirlpool swirl like a greedy, swallowing mouth, sucking in and spewing out.<sup>83</sup> This hollow below a tree-and-mountain configuration matches the model of an *omphalos* as a cauldron, a

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Butterworth, *Tree* p. 37, *passim*.

<sup>80</sup> Eventually sealed by a stone, 13, 371. III, pp. 59ff.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. the enlightenment of Buddha, under a tree.

<sup>82</sup> It is here assumed modern Ithaki was also Homer’s Ithaka. Bittlestone (2006) disagrees: Peliki peninsula of Cephalonia is Homer’s Ithaka. This is disputed by Michael Wood in *The Scotsman*, Sept. 30<sup>th</sup>. 2005, on the basis of geographical matches in book 9 of the *Odyssey* and the archaeological finds in the cave of the Bay of Phorkys.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Guénon, *FS* pp. 242-245: the mouth in association with liminal places (doorways). Cf. the ‘Mouths’ of Plato’s Myth of Er.

well, or a reservoir below the axis-mound, even down to the two-way flow. It is a familiar element in ancient fables, as the *maelstrom* of the Norse tradition for example, which was located mythically where the great mill of the cosmos was unhinged from its millstone.<sup>84</sup> The ‘hole in the sea’ in these tales is the navel of the sea which possesses the same attributes as the navel of the land, which also lies above rivers and waters. Both have the potential to connect with the ‘navel of the sky’ of the celestial rupture of the planes. This sea-navel can overflow and flood the world; hence it must be blocked, in many mythologies, by a rock, millstone or capstone, just as the *Odyssey*’s omphaloid caves are closed by massive boulders.

Odysseus comes to Charybdis out of the night and at the rising of the sun (429), the transition point when it is neither night nor day, and the sun is first seen on the horizon. He reaches high to take hold and cling like a bat, and there he hangs without support (435). Lattimore translates this line as “for the roots of it were far from me”. “*Rhizoi gar hekas eichon*” does indeed give ‘roots far away’ but not necessarily ‘far below’ as in some translations,<sup>85</sup> and as ‘common and rational’ sense would dictate. This opens the *irrational* possibility that the roots are *above* him.

Odysseus hanging from the branches, as a bat, is at first sight a preposterous and unheroic image. I believe we are faced with a riddle. Behind the brief bat simile there lie two related concepts: firstly the dead souls that gibber their way *downwards* to Hades (death and potential rebirth) and secondly the idea of *inversion*.<sup>86</sup> Since Homer makes such subtle narrative use of the interplay of reversals, in similes of age, gender, and kinship,<sup>87</sup> he could well have been drawn to the image-potential of above-below inversion, which is after all the directional pattern of communication between and gods

<sup>84</sup> Cf. De Santillana and von Dechend (1977) pp. 204-212.

<sup>85</sup> E.g. trans. Rieu (1945) p. 206; trans. Goold, Loeb, p. 48. Heubeck, *ad loc.* gives *ekas* as far below because Odysseus is embracing the tree trunk.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Ezekiel, 17. 3ff., an inverted tree, the vine. Cf. Butterworth, *Tree* p. 16. Plato, *Timaeus* 90A. RV I, CLXXXII, 7. Cf. Rees and Rees (1961) p. 192f. on the inverted Norse tree “as old as the *Rg Veda*”: the nine branches indicate *eight* plus a leader, p. 193.

<sup>87</sup> H. P. Foley (1978).



and man - from Olympos to earth, in the Greek instance.

Inversion in association with a fig tree takes us to the mythic tree of India, the *asvattha* or sacred fig, the *ficus religiosa*, whose distinguishing feature is its aerial roots.<sup>88</sup> The fig has been credited in the earliest literature with an essential role in holding up the sky with its 'ropes' and maintaining the world's ties to the Pole Star. It belongs to a panoply of ancient cosmic trees.<sup>89</sup> As either the *ficus religiosa* or pipal, this tree has been held sacred in India since the age of the Indus Valley civilisation, so an understanding of the sacred tree of Hindu tradition and other mythic parallels, may assist our interpretation of the cryptic Charybdis episode.

An epiphyte or air plant (growing on other trees) the pipal takes time to develop roots of its own to support its eventual height of ninety feet or more, and lives to a great age. This is a 'heaven-seeking' tree. It has heart-shaped leaves which 'rustle and talk' in the wind. A seal discovered at Mohenjodaro shows the pipal leaf with antithetical animal heads in horn-like conjunction, as well as a possible 'centre', a fish and a wheel; this accumulation of symbols, all meaningful, places the pipal at the cosmic Centre, as the axial line of the World Tree (III, 4). The horned 'guardian dragons' unfolding from the sun disk may represent the two solstice paths.

Fig. III, 4.

**'Solar Tree' with Dragons.**  
**Indus valley seal, 3<sup>rd</sup>. millennium.**  
**Tree of Life with central pillar,**  
**sunwheel and fish.**  
**Coomaraswamy (*Door*) p. 47, figure 11.**



88 Cf. A. Parpola (2005) p. 241: *Asvattha* possibly from *vatam*, rope or cord, *Vata*, 'fig', cognate with Dravidian *vata*, north, thus the 'tree of the north'.

89 Cf. James (1966) p. 257. Cf. De Santillana, von Dechend (1977) pp. 447f.

The timeless, eternal fig, its roots above and its branches below, is visualised as a book of knowledge in which every leaf corresponds to the words of the sacred Vedas. “The sun does not illumine that, Nor the moon, nor fire”.<sup>90</sup> Here we engage with metaphor; this is no tree known on earth, and it shares both with the shamanic tree and the location of Circe’s island a puzzling lack of illumination. It has the power to free man from the restrictive cycles of rebirth.

The tree as a symbol or allegory of ‘mind’ is an ancient concept of wide distribution.<sup>91</sup> The plant form has enormous potential for development into metaphors of growth, expansion, and contact with the divine, which explains in part the enormous influence of the Cosmic Tree as the major iconographic image of the earth-heaven bond.

The etymology of *asvattha* makes it the ‘tree of the horse’, since *asva* gives ‘horse’, as it does the name of the cosmic twin horsemen, the Asvins. Horse and god and tree are able to meld into a single image in which a *horse* can be described in (to our mind) most uncomfortable metaphor, as “great or high, or shadeless and leafless”.<sup>92</sup> This is an example of the ‘riddling’ imagery which is the prime mode of expression in the Vedic hymns. In his commentary on the Vedic ‘horse-tree’, Murray Fowler makes specific comparison of the *asvattha* with Yggdrasil (‘tree-horse’ of Odin) and the ‘brightness’ of Olympos, the radiant pillars discussed by Evans (1901) and the directional problems encountered by the travellers on the island of Circe. I propose that these disparate tree variants are all elaborations of the *axis mundi*, as Fowler comes very close to

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<sup>90</sup> BG 15, 6. Cf. Butterworth, *Tree* p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> Horowitz (1993).

<sup>92</sup> M. Fowler (1947) pp. 270-273.

acknowledging.<sup>93</sup>

The motif of ‘hanging on a tree’ was established early in the East where it preceded a return to life from the underworld.<sup>94</sup> The central tree connected to heaven and /or hell, and offering two-directional movement, further represents the cosmological bond as the source of knowledge and well-being, which operates by testing, judging, teaching, and ultimately re-invigorating its subjects.

Such Odyssean examples as the fig of the hero’s inversion prepare us for an understanding of the trees and columns of the Minoan ‘cosmic’ city and its centralising ideology.<sup>95</sup>

### ***Power and Authority:***

#### ***Lance, spear, sceptre, staff and baldric***

The presence of ‘the god in the wood of the tree’ helps to explain the magical function of various implements, whether as weapons, ritual or cultic objects. Weapons such as the **sceptre** exert power, as much the tools of the gods and goddesses as they are of man: Poseidon (*Il.* 13, 59-65; 14, 385-6) and Hermes (24, 3), have their potent weapons and Circe, her transformative **wand** (10, 238-41), which is, nonetheless, vanquished by the superior force of the hero’s **sword** (10, 293-6).

The sceptre or staff could serve as a form of the world axis in Egyptian iconography, in particular as the supports of the four corners of the sky in the hands of the Four Sons of Horus.<sup>96</sup> The ‘Sons’ and their sceptres help the king to rise again in the east after death. This encourages us to test for a supernatural aspect to the sceptre as

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 272, note 14.

<sup>94</sup> Bötticher (1856) gives a full treatment, chap. 16. Nagy (1979) p. 180: “a thing of nature transformed into a thing of culture”.

<sup>95</sup> V, pp. 53f. *passim*.

<sup>96</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 12f.

a symbol of kingly power and authority in the Homeric context.

A staff in any form and in the right hands is endued with power. When Hektor is battling with Aias in *Iliad* 7, 260-282, striking “the knob of the centre” (267) of his adversary’s shield (and Aias replies with a bigger “rock like a millstone”, 270), heralds must intervene. The “staves” the two heralds which interpose with effect, are interpreted by Onians as “the life power in striking transmissive form”.<sup>97</sup> This is an inspired reading of a context in which the staff is interposed between two ‘*omphalos*-centres’ in the form of shields and their central boss. The net result is the image “axis + two paths”.

In the same epic the golden sceptre of Agamemnon’s fathers, “immortal forever,” *aphthiton* (*Il.* 2, 46 = 186) is sufficiently ‘alive’ to carry its own genealogy (100-108). According to Pausanias, a sceptre (said to be Agamemnon’s staff of *Il.* 2, 101f.) was sufficiently ‘god-like’ to become an object of cult worship among the Chaironeians.<sup>98</sup> The tree-god was worshipped and offered sacrifice not only as a sceptre, but as a lance or staff, in other cults.<sup>99</sup> The ‘sceptre’ was moreover frequently surmounted by an eagle (= axial bird motif).<sup>100</sup>

For all the king’s denials (*Il.* 1, 26) of the power of the staff to protect from harm, the opposite is implicit in Agamemnon’s words to the dishonoured priest Chryses: “lest your staff and the god’s ribbons help you *no longer*”... (28, my italics).

In his rage at the cowardice of Agamemnon, Achilles swears an oath in the name of the sceptre which has left behind the cut stump<sup>101</sup> in the mountains and will never blossom again (*Il.* 1, 233-5). A ‘failure to blossom’ hints at the corruption of the sceptre-branch in the hands of an unjust king, but also, implicitly, the transferred,

<sup>97</sup> Onians (1951) p. 456f., note 2.

<sup>98</sup> Pausanias 9. 40. 6; trans. Levi, vol. 1, pp. 398f. Nagy (1974) pp. 242f. note 16.

<sup>99</sup> Bötticher (1865) pp. 232-240. Pindar, *Pythian* 1, 6.

<sup>100</sup> Pausanias 8, 38. 7: Eagles stood on the pillars of Zeus at the temple on Mt. Lykaeos.

<sup>101</sup> Butterworth, *Tree* p. 51, sees the stump as an *omphalos* image. A. B. Cook (1904) p. 414, suggests a stump was once the *omphalos* of Delphi.

inherent power of mountain <sup>102</sup> and tree. When however Agamemnon's sceptre was planted in his *hearth* at Mycenae in a prophetic dream related in Sophocles' *Elektra*, <sup>103</sup> it put forth foliage that shaded the whole city. Here are late, familiar echoes of the 'tree as axis', doubled by the 'tree-on-mountain' motif, and fortified by the axis and *omphalos* association (tree and stump, sceptre, smoke-axis and regenerative fire of the hearth), whilst the sceptre in the epic is revealed as a regulator of justice.

Achilleus possesses in his own right an ash spear, a gift of the gods to his immortal father Peleus. He alone can wield it (*Il.* 16, 141f. = 19, 388f.), and it is destined to escape Hektor's theft of Achilleus' armour from the body of Patroklos. Cut from a tree on the summit of Mount Pelion and polished by Athene herself, it had conferred divine protection.

When we consider the extended metaphor in which Achilleus is configured as a star or as a fire <sup>104</sup> which matches the cosmic fires above, themselves twinned with the fires on the plains of Troy (*Il.* 19,17; 21,522f.), then it is possible to view the combined hero and his weapon as *a single cosmic force*. His bronze armour blazes like a star, fire or the rising sun at 19, 398; 22, 32 and 135; a blaze of fire 'shoots' from his head as he goes into battle (18, 207-214) and most remarkably, his spear is topped by the evening star at line 317 in book 22. <sup>105</sup> The linear connection between the hero and the heavens, with an implied flow of cosmic power, could not be more explicit.

During his *aristeia* (19, 362-391), Achilleus' armour not only emanates a celestial light, it puts forth "wings" that uphold him (19, 386). We might dismiss as no more than elegant detail if the context were not so powerfully laden with other cosmic references. The concentrated imagery in book 19 (365-398) of six similes (five relating to fire) in

<sup>102</sup> III, 34f.

<sup>103</sup> *Elektra*, 417-423. Gernet (1981) p. 236. Nagy (1990c) pp. 143f.: hearth, Hestia, and kingship.

<sup>104</sup> Fourteen fire/ light images of Achilleus in all. Moulton (1977) p. 85.

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Evans, *TPC* pp. 146-152: rayed pillars which emanate light or fire.

33 lines, is unprecedented in the poems.<sup>106</sup> Moulton has commented on the particularly integrated comparisons of book 22, 317-22, which bind the total fabric of the epic through allusions and echoes.

This poetic imagery of height, flight and fire hints at contact between the hero, his spear, and sources of transcendent power, even the *sun* (19, 398), together creating an axial bond between god and man.

### *Afterlife:*

#### *Oar and stele*

An understanding of the way in which wooden implements can assume cosmic values, as in the case of the ‘cosmic spear’, may help to unravel one of the most perplexing passages in the *Odyssey*. This occurs at a highly significant juncture in the relation of the Adventures, at the pivot-point of the first Nekyia, when Tiresias foretells the rout of the suitors and the death of Odysseus (11, 97-137). It is offered as “very clear proof”, *sema*, (126) that the journeying hero will come to a land of men who know nothing of the sea and believe that the oar he carries upon his shoulder is a winnowing fan. At that moment he must “plant the well-shaped oar in the ground” (129) and make sacrifice to Poseidon. The magico-religious significance of the object (oar or fan) is confirmed in this passage by the references to sacrifice and the death of the hero in old age and the prosperity which is to be the happy lot of Odysseus’ people (136f.). These are characteristics of many of Homer’s ‘paradise places’ where time is suspended.<sup>107</sup>

If, as I interpret, either object is a microcosmic version of the axis, it would symbolically ‘connect’ the officiant of the “ceremonious sacrifice” (130) to the heavens, to become be a token of divine empowerment. The prosperity and timelessness (“sleek old age”, 136) which will follow can be read as the favourable outcome in terms of the

<sup>106</sup> Moulton (1977) p. 108.

<sup>107</sup> E.g. Alkinoos’ orchard; Olympos. IV, p. 38f.

well-being of men and their crops or livestock, on which life depends, which lies in the power of the axis.

The oar or fan quoted in this death-oriented passage, the Nekyia, would be replacing the flat *stele* slab which is the more common grave marker in the Archaic age and even earlier, in the Grave Circle A at Mycenae, for example. Homer speaks of the use of tomb markers at several points in the *Iliad*,<sup>108</sup> and in the case of the grave of Elpenor, both an oar and a *stele* mark the burial place (12, 14f.). If oar and stele are both axis variants, then a common link with delayed death and prosperity (fertility) help to elucidate this obscure passage.

### *Shield and baldric*

The Shield of Achilles was constructed as a World Image. Somewhere within, we might expect to find a reference to a sustaining world axis. None appears directly, but the twelfth century AD Bishop Eustathius<sup>109</sup> glossed the silver **baldric** or arm strap of Achilleus' shield, *telamon* (*Il.* 18, 480) as an *axis*.

"Now the silver baldric, through which the shield is supported on the top, he [Homer] interprets as the axis (*axôn*) which holds everything up, suspended, as it were, from the highest heavens and passing through the middle of the earth and having its limits towards the south and preparing to revolve the heavens around it, [these being] held up by it".

As for the five leather folds of the shield, these are the two line of the Tropics (solstices), the two Polar regions (*polos*), and the Equator.<sup>110</sup> This attribution is part of Eustathius' wider interpretation of the Shield as a symbol of the cosmos.

In Latin, *telamones* name those male supporting figures in architecture which

<sup>108</sup> *Il.* 11, 371f.; 16, 675; 17, 434f. *Od.* 12, 14, trans. Lattimore, "gravestone" and "oar"; trans. Goold, Loeb edition, "pillar" and "oar".

<sup>109</sup> Eustathius, *Ad Homeri Iliadem*, 1154. 39ff.; also 829.12. Eustathius, *Ad Homeri Odysseam* 1390. 7, = *axis mundi*, according to Nagler (1996) p. 145, note 13. Cf. Hardie (1985) p. 15.

<sup>110</sup> Eustathius, *Ad Homeri Iliadem*, 1154. 53/4-58/9. trans. C. Emlyn Jones, personal communication.

correspond to the Greek *Atlantes*, themselves the male equivalents of the female Caryatides.<sup>111</sup> The symbolic spectrum of this usage therefore embraces shield strap, Atlas (and by association, mountain and “navel of the sea”), axis, *axis mundi*, male body, and pillar of the house, where the house is the microcosm of the cosmos. The shield as a microcosmos representing the earth is held upright by the shield strap as an axis.

### ***Craft and Construction:***

#### ***Loom, shuttle and mast***

Circe and Kalypso and Odysseus’ wife, Penelope, are workers at the loom, like all women of their standing.<sup>112</sup> The **loom** comes to bear thematic importance in the *Odyssey*, to a cosmic degree with Helen’s “great web, / a red folding robe” preserving the memory of the Trojan war (*Il.* 3, 125-8) and Penelope’s weaving and unweaving of the threads of the life of Laertes, in the form of his burial shroud (2, 94-109) which “shone like the sun or the moon” (24, 148). The symbolism of weaving lends itself to extended metaphors linking the polarities of birth and death, creation and dissolution, predestination and its fulfilment. All are intermittently configured as threads to be spun, cut and woven. As spinsters and weavers plying shuttle and distaff, the great goddesses who hold power over time determine causes and effects in the lives of men and preserve the memory of heroes’ great deeds, thus ensuring their *kleos*. They function on a cosmological time-scale.

The etymology of the loom, *histos*, takes us to the **mast** of a ship, also *histos*.<sup>113</sup> Here we recall the mast which preserved Odysseus from the dangerous song of the Sirens, and the broken spars which carried him to Scheria; equally the fir tree on

<sup>111</sup> J. P. Brown (1968) p. 46 and note 28. Vitruvius 6.7.6.

<sup>112</sup> Helen (4, 131-135) and Arete (6, 305f.) are spinners. The axis is a spindle in Plato’s *Myth of Er*, *Republic*, 616ff.

<sup>113</sup> The etymology may be due to the upright loom model of antiquity.



Kalypso's Ogygia which "towered to Heaven", *ouranomekes* (5, 239), but gave itself up for the mast timber of his boat; there is the great staff of Polyphemos which was large enough for the mast of a ship but became, like all the masts quoted here, the saving force of the hero and companions. Homer gives us not only a mast as a loom, but in metaphor, a 'spine' (the hero lashed upright to the mast 12, 178f.), a 'horse' when he sits astride like a rider (5, 371), and effectively, but not stated, a 'gateway' <sup>114</sup> of keel and mast lashed together where the hero came "crashing down between" (12, 443).

Spine, <sup>115</sup> and horse <sup>116</sup> are common metaphors of the cosmic axis, and the gateway, <sup>117</sup> an *omphalos*.

The symbolism of the tree-mast is implicit in the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysos*. <sup>118</sup> When the pirate-kidnapper of the god refuses to free him, wine bubbles up through the ship, and the mast becomes a column of vine with ivy and clustered with grapes, springing "up the sail / to the top." <sup>119</sup> The utilitarian mast has given way to the potent and fertile mythical tree which provides a magical drink. <sup>120</sup>

The image has been transferred (in a later context) onto a black figure kylix (III, 6) with the difference that the mast-tree, as a vine, emerges from the groin or *navel* of a recumbent Dionysos.



Fig. III, 6.

Attic black figure kylix. c. 530.  
Munich Museum 2044.

<sup>114</sup> III, pp. 51-57.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Spine: Butterworth, *Tree* plate XVI.

<sup>116</sup> Horse: Fowler (1947). III, pp. 23f.

<sup>117</sup> West, *East* p. 407, 436, cosmic portals and gates of the sun.

<sup>118</sup> *H. H. to Demeter*, trans. Cashford pp. 100-105.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. lines 35-47.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. The Indian axis may be a column, or the mystical potion, *Soma* (*amrita* or ambrosia of the gods). Srinivasan (1978) pp. 209-217. Eliade, *Encyclopedia* vol. 13, pp. 414ff., *Soma*.

*Column, Pillar, Kingpost and Flagpole*

Martin West is of the view that “the sky-supporting [cosmic] pillar does not play a prominent role in Greek myth”, and considers it rare also in the Near East.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless he is able to provide a dozen or more examples which link the Greek concept to literary and artistic evidence from Anatolia, Syria and Assyria. He highlights the “fluctuation” between pillars and an Atlas figure, which is at least an encouragement to seek other such variants as those identified in these pages.

In the *Odyssey*, the pillar / column-as-axis motif resonates from the first book, in motifs which lend more than status value to the pillar and link it to other sacred objects, such as Athene’s “powerful spear” which the courteous host Telemachos places among others “against a tall column” (1,127).

The olive tree of Odysseus’ bedchamber, as noted, was thick, “like a column” (*kion*, 23, 191). If this simile may be interpreted as creating an identity between the two referents, then clearly the column shares the qualities of the tree. We shall explore the possible cosmic significance of the column on that basis.

That the column is a place of strength, prestige or safety is implied by the location of the blind Demodokos’ “silver-studded chair” (8, 65) near the pillar, and his “clear-toned lyre” (67) hung there, all perhaps to be ‘energised’ in an exceptional location.

The pillar / column is closely associated in the epic with royalty and distinction, so mundane purpose is unlikely here.<sup>122</sup> Odysseus’ mourning wife seems drawn to the safety or high status of the pillar that is possibly a kingpost of the house, and the picture we have of Penelope as a veiled and “shining” being, so often standing by “the pillar that supported the roof with its joinery” (1, 328) and ever flanked by her two attendants, virtually at one with the sustaining column, effectively identifies her as the radiant

<sup>121</sup> West, *East* p. 148f.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Old Testament coronations close to pillars: Judges 9, 6; II Chronicles 23, 13; II Kings 11, 14. At the coronation of Jehoash, “the king stood by a pillar *as the manner was*” (my italics). In II Kings 23, 3, the pledging of a covenant takes place by a pillar.

spiritual force contained within it (1, 328-335; 18, 206-211). Arete spins in the firelight, “leaning against a pillar”; again, the sense is of the essential bond between the two (6, 307).<sup>123</sup> (I shall return the woman-pillar accommodation in later pages).<sup>124</sup>

Odysseus finds Arete and Alkinoos near pillars when he enters the palace as a suppliant and sits beside their hearth in the ashes (7,153). The palace is in all likelihood envisioned with a megaron-style interior where the central hearth is framed by four pillars. Much later when Odysseus waits in his own firelight (23, 89-90) he occupies the place by the pillar, which, if it is an *axis mundi*, is his by right now that the suitors are routed and the palace reclaimed. He has come into his kingship, and possession of the axis appears to be the birthright of the legitimate king.<sup>125</sup>

The pillar, as a ‘tree in stone’, plays a part in the *Odyssey* as an instrument of judgment. It is there that Odysseus sends the treacherous Melanthios to be strung up high on the column, again *kion* (22,193). A similar fate is meted out to the maidservants who die a wretched death on the *kionos...megales* like little birds caught in a snare (22, 465-473). The women are to die on a tree of justice. The bird simile is particularly apt, since the top of the tree is the traditional place for the bird of the axis which translates the sky or solar element.<sup>126</sup>

“Birds” effectively evoke the pillar as a tree. The later use of *kion*, moreover, widens the scale of references to include the mountain and sustaining sky-pillar. *Kion* is employed in the Septuagint to indicate the pillars of the house destroyed by Samson (Judges 16. 25, 26, 29), but Herodotus (IV. 184) makes of it the sustaining pillar of the sky, *kiona tou ouranou*. Pindar’s column of the sky, *kion ourania* (*I Pythian*, 37) describes Mount Etna.

Describing two peaks inhabited by monstrous forces, Skylla and Charybdis, Homer

<sup>123</sup> Intermediate between tree and column is the flagpole. In Egyptian hieroglyphics, the flagpole is *nehet*, which also means ‘goddess’. Gardiner (1994) R 8, p. 502.

<sup>124</sup> III, pp. 40-44.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. V, pp. 98-110.

<sup>126</sup> Wensinck (1921) pp. 36-50. Cf. Coomaraswamy (1939b).

employs details which draw upon the imagery of the axial pillar. Of Skylla's rock, the highest, we learn that:

“[it] reaches up into the wide heaven  
with a pointed peak, and a dark cloud stands always around it,  
and never at any time draws away from it, nor does the sunlight  
ever hold that peak, either in the early or the late summer,  
nor could any man who was mortal climb there, or stand mounted  
on the summit, not if he had twenty hands and twenty  
feet, for the rock goes sheerly up, as if it were polished”. (12, 73-79).

The rock is more in the nature of a pillar than a natural cliff, and one sacralised with oil, it is implied in the simile. A double incongruity, which is here the unlikelihood of a pillar-like rock in the ocean being polished at all, as well as the monstrousness of a man having twenty hands and feet, must be intended to alert the listener to a sense of something other than the literal. Perpetual darkness in association with this pillar is another factor which links this ‘pillar in the sea’ to other supernatural places which seem to be immune to the usual patterns of sunlight.

Therefore it is very likely an axis, not carrying man to the gods or the gods to men, but bearing the dark, sunless channel that leads to Hades; the presence of carnivorous, man-swallowing Skylla (‘downward movement’) in her cave makes this evident. It will be recalled that when Odysseus is on Circe's island, an omphaloid island which “lies low”, “the endless sea...all in a circle around it” (10, 196f.) whence he will travel to Hades, he experiences a loss of orientation (190). There too, the stone of the house was of smooth, well-polished stone (11, 211), and it was “*hiera domata*” (422, 445). On such omphaloid-axial places such as Skylla's rock or Circe's island, he and his companions are directionless, since ‘sunless’, lost in the dark cloud that obscures the axis - in contrast to the brilliant white light of Olympos - and beyond the reach of the sun.

*The mountain-axis*

Virtually all the meanings proposed for the cosmic tree, pillar and column can be applied to the mountain, which fulfils the axial function on a lofty and grandiose scale. It binds heaven to earth and underworld; it acts as navel and World Centre; <sup>127</sup> it facilitates movement in both directions, and ‘elevates’ in both mystical and physical senses. Like the cosmic tree, it is susceptible to that imagery of inversion which brings the world of the spirit into the realm of men. <sup>128</sup>

The mountain home of the gods, Olympos, enjoys a mythic freedom from time (“forever”), and from extremities of climate, “not shaken with winds nor spattered / with rains” (6, 42-45). In its clearness and brilliance, the Greek mountain of the gods shares the same extreme axial height and constancy.

Pausanias informs us that the temple of Zeus was placed on top of (double-peaked) Mount Lykaion, where the god’s altar faced east from between twin columns, <sup>129</sup> thus making the great god (in or on his altar) ‘the solar axis at the centre’ through overlapping references to sun, height, and a flanking gateway which place him at the *omphalos* point. <sup>130</sup> The columns carrying eagle forms, represented the “spiritual being”, suggests Evans. <sup>131</sup>

Another remarkable feature of the Lykaian site is its reported lack of shadows from any source, living or inanimate. <sup>132</sup> The same lack of shadow occurs at Ethiopian Syene (Aswan), Pausanias tells us, when the sun stands in Cancer (its highest point). <sup>133</sup> On Lykaion, however, ‘shadowless-ness’ is a permanent state, he adds. The inference is that

<sup>127</sup> West, *East* p. 149f., describing the ‘cosmic mountain-navel centre’ myth: initially, to shamanistic sources, and subsequently, to Anatolian ideology, whence it reached Semitic lands via Canaanite practice. Cf. Mabbett (1983). Cf. Huber (1999).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Cirlot, *DS* mountain: pp. 219ff.

<sup>129</sup> Pausanias 8, 38, 7. trans. Levi, vol. 2. pp. 468f.

<sup>130</sup> V, pp. 105-110.

<sup>131</sup> Evans, *TPC* p. 127. Pausanias, trans. Levi, vol. 2. p. 468, note 284.: “Something to do with the solstice”.

<sup>132</sup> Pausanias 8. 38, 5-7. (This seems to be the earliest extant record of this feature of the temple). Fowler (1947) pp. 271ff.: “shadowless” trees and mountains, as evidence of “divinity and deathlessness”.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 6. trans. Levi, vol. 2. p. 468, note 284.

whereas solstice time at Syene produces ‘magical’ solar phenomena, Lykaion’s supernatural state is *independent of time* (when defined by solar movement).

For the Arkadians, Mt. Lykaion is their Holy Peak, their Olympos and birth place of Zeus.<sup>134</sup> In view of such claims for a ‘magical,’ ancient, shadowless place in Pausanias’ testimony, Carl Kerényi’s interpretation has much to commend it. (This is the scholar who sees *Iliad* 14 as a genuine, mythological tale of *primordial* time). For him, Lykaion’s connection with “a light myth” makes this “a timeless place above life or death”.<sup>135</sup>

The same phenomenon may be adduced from Odysseus’ difficulties on Circe’s island. Before the invention of the compass, direction had to be determined by the (unreliable) winds, and the (accurate) sun and stars. The sun’s rays provide both compass-needle and hour-hand in the form of an oblique shadow: only in darkness or at noon on the Equator are shadows absent. We know that Odysseus experiences his disorientation on Circe’s island at dawn (10, 187) and yet, soon after, the sun is not visible (191). A likely inference is that the hero finds himself not *without* light, but like Zeus at Mount Lykaion, directly *within* the sun’s axis, therefore without directional shadow, *and out of time*.<sup>136</sup>

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Olympos as an axial mountain becomes both the conceptual link between three planes, and a measure of justice, in the imagery of the Golden Cord in the *Iliad* (8, 1-27). Those planes allocated to brothers Zeus, Poseidon, Hades must be equidistant, for Zeus threatens the lesser gods who dare to oppose him that they will be whipped back to Olympos, or dashed down below, “as far beneath the house of Hades as from earth the sky lies” (16).<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Pausanias 8. 38. 2.

<sup>135</sup> Kerényi (1975) p. 33.

<sup>136</sup> IV, pp. 7f., 38f. Cf. Woodard (2002) pp. 83, 98.

<sup>137</sup> West, *East* p. 371, identifies Babylonian sources for the golden chain as “the bond or mainstay of

There are many other Odyssean mountains which are significantly more than geographical features. We shall meet them, paired, as doorways and gateways of the sun, as locations where the traveller comes close to leaving this world and passing into the realm of the gods.<sup>138</sup> They are (like Olympos) a link to the heavens.

In order to function as doors or gateways, the mountain must either be cleft, or paired with another of similar proportions, unless, like Gilgamesh, the traveller is envisaged passing through the centre of the mountain itself.<sup>139</sup> But there is no contradiction here: the image 'cleft mountain' corresponds to the doorway constructed from paired doorposts, as well as the saddle-backed or twin-peaked mountain, since the fundamental pattern is that of two verticals enclosing a single aperture. Thus it is possible to include in the nexus of mountain symbols the harbour with two enclosing promontories in the Laistrygonian land, and the space between two close-set islands. This will be of importance in correlating separate episodes into a meaningful structure, and relating them to Aegean iconography.<sup>140</sup>

### ***The Axis Personified***

#### ***Atlas and Hermes***

Certain gods or goddesses in the epic reveal that they, although 'animate', exemplify the axial power. This is fruitful ground for an appreciation of how seemingly independent analogies can be accommodated, or syncretised, in a single figure.

*Atlas* is a case in point. Homer tells us that the father of Kalypso "discovered / all the depths of the sea", and that he "himself sustains the *towering / columns (kionas makras)* which bracket earth and sky and hold them together" (1, 52-4, my italics). The plural use of "columns" intimates that these are the four pillars, of solstice and equinox,

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heaven and earth".

<sup>138</sup> III, 51-57.

<sup>139</sup> *Gilgamesh*, trans. George, tablet IV, 9-11; tablet IX, 38-41.

<sup>140</sup> IV.

at the world's corners, which sustain the dome of the sky.<sup>141</sup>

From Herodotus we learn that Atlas bore the sky upon his shoulders.<sup>142</sup> In time Atlas gives his name to high mountains, and in the capacity of man-mountain, not only sustains the heavens but, in later tradition, *turns* the heavens, because he *is* the turning axis.<sup>143</sup> There is no difficulty it would seem in mythologising the heavenly bond as concurrently, or variously, mountain, tree or pillar, man or woman, or a fusion of any of these elements. This is the likely explanation of such 'riddling' and incongruous figures of speech as seen in *Il.* 13, 754f., where Hektor "swept through" the Trojans as a "snowy mountain".

It is *Hermes* who in the *Odyssey* offers the fuller picture of the axial god, he with whom Circe and Kalypso share acquaintanceship. An ancient divinity, possibly antedating the Greeks, he appears in the Linear B tablets.<sup>144</sup> An understanding of his axial iconography will pave the way to understanding similar polysemous imagery of tree and divinity in the visual arts.<sup>145</sup>

Hermes is the cave-born god of the crossroads<sup>146</sup> where four directions meet, the one who proffers *moly* ('milk and flower and life-sustainer')<sup>147</sup> to Odysseus (10, 302-7), and the psychopomp who can guide the souls of the departed to their destination. *Thus he knows the ways of the axis.*<sup>148</sup> Hermes in the *Odyssey* flies like a bird across the "deadly deep" waters into which he plunges like a shearwater (5, 50-3), effectively piercing two planes. Clearly Hermes is at home on all three planes of the earth, like any

<sup>141</sup> Barber and Barber (2005) p. 201. fig. 36.

<sup>142</sup> Herodotus 4. 184.

<sup>143</sup> Hardie (1983) p. 223.

<sup>144</sup> *OCD* p. 690. Heubeck / Hainsworth on *Od.* 5, 43, and the "astounding" oddity of the association Hermes / *erma*, cairn, *Od.* 1, 37ff, p. 79. The 'herm' is explicable, I contend, in terms of the pillar as an axis.

<sup>145</sup> **V, pp. 75-77: Hermes; pp. 64-67: Hera.**

<sup>146</sup> Kerényi (1976) pp. 19f.: the "four-square god".

<sup>147</sup> Cf. *Soma* as a plant, a pillar, an axial route and a god in its own right. *RV IX, LXXXIX, 6*: "buttress of the heavens, supporter of earth". Cf. James (1966) pp. 25-29. Hermes, *as an axis*, and bearer of white-flowered *moly*, is readily identified with the life-giving plant.

<sup>148</sup> Nagler (1996) refers to Atlas, Utnapishtim (in *Gilgamesh*) and Teiresias as "axial figures". p. 145. Teiresias as shaman: Butterworth (1966) pp. 147f. Hermes as son of Maia, daughter of Atlas (Euripides, *Ion*, 1-4) has an axial genealogy.



shaman and the axis itself. His route is exemplified in the caduceus which becomes his attribute: a central pillar supporting the two winding, snakelike courses of the Two Paths.<sup>149</sup>

Hermes appears as a 'Master of Animals' in the *H. H. to Hermes* (570-574), 'lord' over lions, boars, dogs and sheep, and in the *Odyssey* he outmanoeuvres the mistress of the animals, Circe.<sup>150</sup> In the same Homeric hymn, he is remembered at lines 405-412 as the god of the tree, when Apollo's attempt to bind him with willow withies fails, and the "thongs" fall away and root in the earth. He is celebrated on mountain tops, at his birthplace Mt. Kyllene for example, where Pausanias saw his ruined temple<sup>151</sup> and at the temple of Zeus on Mt. Lykaioi.<sup>152</sup> Concerning an ancient *agalma* of Hermes on Kyllene, Evans was of the opinion that it was of Minoan workmanship.<sup>153</sup>

The *Odyssey* evidences an existing cult of Hermes as the god of high places. A "Hill of Hermes," *ermaios lophos*, is Eumaios' lookout point above the city (16, 471). But the strongest evidence must be the Homeric use of *erma* and its cognates in the sense of prop, or support: in *Iliad* 1, 486 *ermata makra* are the props to a beached ship. In the *Odyssey*, *ermin* or *ermis* in the form of a well-trimmed bed post appears twice (8, 278 and 23, 198) and this is the olive tree pillar which roots in the bedchamber of Odysseus and Penelope. If the etymology is to be relied upon, these textual and archaeological identifications provide accommodations of Hermes the messenger, with the tree, cairn of stones, hill or mountain, herm, post or pillar.<sup>154</sup>

Hermes (father of Pan)<sup>155</sup> bears a strong affinity to the Pusan of Indic tradition, whose cosmic role is described here in Appendix 2.<sup>156</sup> An interesting observation by

<sup>149</sup> V, figs. 7, p. 22; 38, p. 63.

<sup>150</sup> Marinatos (2000) pp. 124f. Circe belongs to a type of aggressive 'Mistress of the Animals'; she is dangerous to men until tamed by a superior force.

<sup>151</sup> Pausanias 8, 17, 1-2.

<sup>152</sup> Cook, *Zeus* vol.1, p. 84. note 1.

<sup>153</sup> Evans, *PM* III, p. 524. Farnell, *Cults* vol. V, 1ff.

<sup>154</sup> V, figs. 48-54, pp. 75-78.

<sup>155</sup> E. L. Brown (1977). Gantz (1996) pp. 110f.

<sup>156</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 5-7.

Kerényi associates Hermes with the life source,<sup>157</sup> more specifically the masculine element of that creative emanation that needs to be bonded with the female to complete the procreative energy.<sup>158</sup> The god is named “the masculine source of life” in Kerényi’s title, and further described as an abstract principle, a “way of being” and “an idea”.<sup>159</sup> Such a view divests the Homeric god of his mythological persona and takes him back to first principles.

Hermes’ essential female counterpart with whom he makes up the early cosmic totality would appear to be Hestia.<sup>160</sup> They are named together in the *Homeric Hymn to Hestia*,<sup>161</sup> as both dwelling in the “beautiful homes of people who dwell on earth” (14f.) and as following “good deeds with *wisdom* and strength” (17f. my italics). Wisdom or knowledge is an essential feature of the axis.

But the pairing of god and goddess has a deeper sense as a metaphysic of space. Hestia provides a fixed, hearth point at the centre of the *oikos*, which defines human activity; Hermes is the mobile element which links opposite states of above / below. Together, in the Structuralist view,<sup>162</sup> they create a homology of man / woman and their respective roles in society. We are now in a position to recognise the pattern of the *axis* (male, vertical, and movement) allied with the *omphalos* (female, central / horizontal and static) which define the totality of cosmic space in the personifications of Hermes and Hestia.<sup>163</sup>

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The homologisation of man and cosmos occurs universally in the cosmogonic myths of the primordial giant.<sup>164</sup> Man is also identified with the house as a living body, where

<sup>157</sup> Kerényi (1976) pp. 60ff.: “rather close to the feminine”.

<sup>158</sup> Cf. Hermes + Aphrodite as, jointly, *hermaphrodite*.

<sup>159</sup> Kerényi (1976) p. 4.

<sup>160</sup> First attested by Pausanias 5. 11. 8: inscription on base of statue of Zeus at Olympia.

<sup>161</sup> Trans. Cashford (2003) pp. 138f.

<sup>162</sup> Vernant (1983) pp. 127-175.

<sup>163</sup> Vernant (1983) p. 147 reminds us that the herm is quadrilateral, square; Hestia’s hearth is round. Together, square and round represent completeness.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. Stone (1992). Cf. Denisova (2001).

he himself is metaphorically the sustaining column of his dwelling or polity.<sup>165</sup> The mythic form is equally to be found in Pindar's naming of Hektor as "Troy's invincible pillar of strength", "*Troias amachon astrabe kiona*".<sup>166</sup> The leader's physical body there becomes a metaphor of the sustaining axis or kingpost of the 'city as house'.

### ***Goddesses and Queens***

Homer's 'dread goddesses' **Circe** and **Kalypso** fulfil the same function as Hermes, but as representatives of opposing forces and cardinal directions. In symbolic terms, they correspond to the two mountains, two ways or Two Paths, to the divine twin horsemen, or to the two serpents that entwine the axis of the caduceus. I propose that their roles in the resolution of Odysseus' spiritual journey amount to guardianship of the upward and downward ways of the axis ruled by gods such as Hermes. Their significance will be explored and defined in section IV.

### ***Penelope***

Certain aspects of Penelope's conduct indicate a cosmic role for the lady of Ithaka, just as her husband's voyages have their solar overtones. She is regularly accompanied by two maidservants, one to each side, in the style of flanking figures.<sup>167</sup> She is characteristically seen descending the staircase from the chamber where she presumably sleeps and weeps for Odysseus, despite the marital chamber with rooted olive tree on the ground floor built for her by her husband. It is however her repeated radiant appearances<sup>168</sup> at the pillar, clad in her "shining" veil, which indicate the source of her authority.

An interpretation of the pillar of these contexts as a cosmic axis receives confirmation from Egbert Bakker, who also quotes Eliade on World Trees and Pillars.

<sup>165</sup> Eliade, *SSA* p. 121f.

<sup>166</sup> Pindar, *II Olympian Ode*, 81f.

<sup>167</sup> Butterworth, *Tree* p. 20f.: paired attendants. Cf. Telemachus, two dogs; Odysseus, swineherd and oxherd; Nausikaa's two attendants (6, 17-19).

<sup>168</sup> Butterworth, *Tree* pp. 140ff.: radiant beings. Evans, *TPC* radiant pillars: pp. 146-152; 172-175.

<sup>169</sup> It is a “domestic axis [which] owes its force to the cosmic axis over which Calypso presides”.<sup>170</sup> The author further supports Michael Nagler’s several identifications of the *Odyssey*’s axial elements.<sup>171</sup>

In Yakut shaman tales there is an ancient goddess whose body emerges from the Tree of Life <sup>172</sup> *with which she is one*, and it is she who grants Man the water of life, and knowledge. <sup>173</sup> Penelope meets the iconic criteria of just such a ‘tree-pillar-goddess’ through her intelligence and associations with weaving, marriage to the journeying hero, and now, her ‘oneness’ with the radiant pillar, as a variant of the tree. In her weeping, we may be seeing a mythic variant of the ‘waters of life’ which the cosmic tree either provides or stands beside in so many cultures. In the character of a ‘goddess of the tree’,<sup>174</sup> Penelope is claimed in marriage by Odysseus under the sacred olive integrated into their bed, which has strong implications of fertility cult.

The horrific queen of the Laistrygonians, who was as “big as a mountain peak” (10, 112-3), terrified the companions with her size and her deadly intentions (115). In this she may represent the cruel and wintry aspect of Mother Nature or the cosmic giant in female form.<sup>175</sup> Penelope is her opposing doublet, for she too comes close to configuration as a mountain in the nineteenth book, when her tears are compared with the melting snows that run off the mountains. At the same time as she listens and weeps, “her body was melted” (19, 204). Melting snows are the prelude to spring and a well-watered harvest, which makes this queen a beneficent natural force. <sup>176</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Bakker (2001) pp. 344, note 42; 345, note 51; 346, note 54.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p. 346.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid. pp. 345f. and (2005) p. 19, note 47.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Goddesses merging with trees in Egyptian art. Wilkinson (1992) pp. 116f. Ill. 3,4.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Butterworth, *Tree* p.1f. Cf. Holmberg (1922) pp. 57ff.

<sup>174</sup> Dowden (2000) pp. 68f.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Denisova (2001) p. 3, *passim*. The ‘birthing Mother Earth’, a giantess, as recorded in Russian folk embroidery.

<sup>176</sup> Gaster (1950) p. 15ff. Tear-shedding as a ritual act has been associated with “reinvigorating the earth” or “reviving the dead”.

*Athene*

Athene is but one of several 'bird goddesses' who adorn the pages of the *Odyssey*. The birds as avatars of the divinity are sometimes the hawks who dominate the skies and swoop to the land at great speed, or sometimes water birds, while the swallow skims the surface of the waters as it feeds on insects. The significance here is that the bird as representative of the heavens reaches down and meets the planes of earth and sea, and even penetrates them. To go further: the woman (or man) can appear, at various times, as bird and pillar, woman and bird, woman and pillar, or woman and mountain, and the permutations are many.

The pillar associated with Athene in classical art has also been 'read' as the *cippus* or *terma* of the race track.<sup>177</sup> Since the Greek and Roman games involving 'outward' and 'returning' paths have strong association with initiatory, funerary and cosmological themes,<sup>178</sup> a wisdom goddess is fully appropriate to the central post of reversal, which can be equated with the post<sup>179</sup> at the junction of the Two Ways (or two rivers of Hades) at the foot of the axis.

With such a central, even cosmic, role, it is no surprise to find Athene involved in the restoration of Odysseus to his kingly function. Athene plays the part of the palace goddess in another context, as she is a fiery, arrow-diverting presence when the succession to kingship is involved. We know that she can assume unusual stature, as she does in the course of her encounter with Odysseus on the shore of Ithaka, by the olive tree. And she observes events in the palace of Odysseus, as a bird, from the height of the beams (22, 236-240). But it is in her capacity as light-bearer that Athene comes closest to becoming a 'goddess of the axis' when she lights the megaron with her lamp.<sup>180</sup> The axis regularly manifests as sunlight, radiance, or fire, and so it proves here in the case of the

<sup>177</sup> E.g. the 'Mourning Athena' relief with pillar, Acropolis Museum, Athens, c. 460.

<sup>178</sup> Lyle (1984) pp. 827-832. Burkert (1985) pp. 105-107.

<sup>179</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 5, note 12; p. 6, "*ayu*".

<sup>180</sup> 19, 33f. First mention of the lamp in Greek literature. Beazley (1940) p. 22.

household pillar.

When we consider the other attributes of Athene as a major goddess of classical tradition, customarily given a temple on the highest ground, the snakes of her *aegis*, her olive tree, her bird (the owl, denoting wisdom, or the cock, or winged Nike) that are often placed atop the column which appears many classical pieces,<sup>181</sup> it becomes apparent that Athene carries about her the full panoply of images relating to the *axis mundi*.

### *Arete*

The poet's traditional material shows some signs of matrilinearity, as for example in the characterisation of Arete the queen of Scheria. The primacy which is granted her in Nausikaa's advice, that Odysseus should seek her favour before any other's (6, 304f.) as well as Athene's anticipation of the Queen's favours (7, 75ff.) bear out this view, as also does the extreme respect in which the people hold her as she walks about her city: they "look toward her as to a god" (7, 71). Two striking features of her first appearance (in both of which she resembles Penelope) are her weaving and her occupation of a place by the pillar. Another is her role as administrator of balanced justice. "She dissolves quarrels, even among men, when she favors them" (74). "*Even* among men" implies a divine or very exceptional mortal persona, and the "favour", the whim of a changeable goddess. Justice is a major aspect of the axis, closely allied to wisdom, both being aspects of the primordial intelligence.<sup>182</sup>

### *Female Abstractions: 'Wisdom'*

Wisdom is personified as a female in both Hebrew and Greek literatures. It would appear that she had a place in the earliest cosmogonies too, as an integral part in the creation process, where her creative role finds expression in the erotic aspects of wisdom

<sup>181</sup> Cf. an olive 'of Athene' next to the conceptual 'lake' of Poseidon on the Athenian Acropolis.

<sup>182</sup> Egyptian *Ma'at* (law, justice, truth, world order, and daughter of Re, the sun) is represented by a tall feather or a straight rule or measure. Wilkinson (1992) pp. 36f.

figures across the cultures: Astarte, Inanna, and the Bride of Solomon.<sup>183</sup>

A point of resemblance between Athene, Arete, Penelope and Helen as clever, pillar-aligned, goddess figures, is their embodiment as Wisdom, also the emanation of the manifesting godhead. Even the suitors are able to see that Penelope's wisdom, "bestowed by Athene" (2, 116) exceeds that of all famous queens in Greece before her (116-122).

The great goddess of Egypt, Isis, another mistress of Wisdom and Justice, is sister of *Ma'at*, balance, and goddess of nature.<sup>184</sup> In the Hellenistic period she replaces or 'becomes,' *Ma'at*.<sup>185</sup> The first woman, Eve, is eternally linked with the Tree of Knowledge. Ashera-Ashteroth-Astarte, or Ishtar, as both goddess and *tree*, was worshipped in the form of a wooden column in the temple of Jahweh. There are suggestions that she too was the consort of the Lord, and that the true role of this Great Mother and figure of divine Wisdom was the 'generative principle', or male and female aspects of God. In that function she would emerge as the *linear* manifestation of the all-containing seed of creation, in which form she was identified with the cosmic axis, Tree of Life,<sup>186</sup> or sacred mountain that unites the upper and lower worlds.<sup>187</sup>

These features enhance the cosmic and creational aspect of pillar goddesses such as I believe Penelope to be, and throw light upon the *hieros gamos* which legitimates Odysseus' return, ensures the land's fertility, and denies the kingship of Ithaka to those aberrant suitors who were so anxious to secure her hand.

<sup>183</sup> A. M. Olson (1980) pp. 154f. A. P. Long (1992).

<sup>184</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library* 1. 14. 1-3.

<sup>185</sup> A. M. Olson (1980) pp. 148-151: Isis as "sustainer of cosmic order".

<sup>186</sup> Butterworth, *Tree* p. 25. A *Polos*-wearing Helen stands between the Dioskouroi, her brothers, in certain Spartan reliefs: Tod and Wace (1968) p. 7. figs 20, 21. She derives her *form* from the pillar and performs the function of the pillar, "yet she is to be worshipped in her own right", claims Butterworth.

<sup>187</sup> V, figs. 73, 74, p. 109. A syncretism of man (or god) and mountain, with central point.

## *Part II: The omphalos*

Jane Harrison long ago made the connection between the hollow marked by a grave stone or stele, or the raised mound (*tumulus*), and the sacred place known as the *omphalos*.<sup>188</sup> She remarked upon the similarity between the *omphalos* mound and the ‘Treasury’ as a money box, and the *tholos* tomb, e.g. ‘Treasury of Atreus’, which was a burial place of circular form, and whose keystone<sup>189</sup> was also called the *omphalos*.

### *The Delphic Omphalos*

Delphi must detain us a short while, as it is the pan-Hellenic sanctuary renowned for its egg-shaped *omphalos* stone of unknown age, which may help to understand the Homeric *omphalos*. Remains of a late Mycenaean village have been found there, with some female figurines. The first dedications appeared around 800, and the earliest temple remains belong to the late seventh century.<sup>190</sup>

The earliest written reference to Delphi appears in the sixth century Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, which provides the first evidence of cult at the centre. It tells us that oracular responses were made “from the laurel tree”,<sup>191</sup> which matches the *Odyssey*’s phrase “from the oak tree” for the revelation at Dodona (14, 327f. = 19, 296f.).<sup>192</sup> There is no mention of the Pythia. This leaves us with little concept of the origin and motivation of the cult and the significance of the stone.

Pindar (5<sup>th</sup>. c.) in his fragment 54,<sup>193</sup> first tells of the practice of oracular consultations held in the innermost sanctuary, where the stone and laurel were located, and the placement of that stone by Zeus. The great god had released two eagles from east and west and marked the point of their meeting as the centre of the world. It is a

<sup>188</sup> Harrison (1912) pp. 399ff.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy (1939).

<sup>190</sup> Hornblower and Spawforth (1998) pp. 215f.

<sup>191</sup> *H.H. to Apollo* 393-396.

<sup>192</sup> Hornblower and Spawforth (1998) p. 217, propose an early Delphic laurel tree-oracle.

<sup>193</sup> Pindar, *Fragments*.



story retold by Strabo.<sup>194</sup> Pausanias<sup>195</sup> mentions another *omphalos* stone at Phlius marking the centre of the Peloponnese, “if what they say is true”.

Although the many epigraphical references and material representations of the stone attest to a substantial tradition,<sup>196</sup> they are too late to identify Delphi as a cosmic ‘centre of the world’ predating Homer and corresponding to a Bronze Age ideology. Yet they offer some start points for inquiry. Additionally, the proposal by architectural historian William Lethaby that the foundation stone of new buildings was sacralised as the ‘centre stone’ by early peoples believing themselves to be ‘the first’ and occupying the centre of the world, provides an apt analogy, and we may have to look at such broader, universal traditions to begin to understand Delphi.<sup>197</sup>

First, the nature and function of an *omphalos* as a physical object. Roscher, who devoted a comprehensive monograph to the subject in 1915, surveyed epigraphical and archaeological evidence before rejecting an origin in the burial mound. He remained convinced that the world centre idea was linked to “rudimentary” ideas of “considerable” antiquity.<sup>198</sup> Concerning another oracle of Apollo (Didyma, near Miletus) he asserted that the real earth navel was the *chasma ges* whence emerged the spring of prophecy, and that the stone served in that place as a marker of a sacred spot.<sup>199</sup>

Perhaps the same conflation of spring, marker stone and oracle could have prevailed at Delphi, and with related meaning. A useful distinction is made by Alain Ballabriga between the *omphalos* as a stone, and the *omphalos* as a centre, ‘middle’ (*meson*).<sup>200</sup> The navel-stone functions primarily on the *cosmic vertical*, and only secondarily on the horizontal plane, whilst the navel-centre belongs to a human or

<sup>194</sup> Strabo 9. 6. 3.

<sup>195</sup> Pausanias 2. 13. 7. trans. Levi, vol 1, p. 162.

<sup>196</sup> Roscher (1913) Chap. IV, lists the occurrences, with plates, in 50 pages.

<sup>197</sup> Lethaby (1994) pp. 72f.

<sup>198</sup> Cf. Roscher (1913) reviewed by Bonner (1915) pp. 462f.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid. p. 462f.

<sup>200</sup> Ballabriga (1986) p. 12.

cosmic sphere “potentially *géométrisable*”.<sup>201</sup> For this scholar the presence of Parnassos’ “colonne céleste”, with the omphaloid stone symbol and a chthonian chasm, makes Delphi a meeting place of several levels of the universe. He does not say so, but this is identifiable axis mythology of linking planes and sacred markers of the transition points.

It is difficult to pursue remote ‘beginnings’ via epigraphical or literary attestations. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood has, for example, pursued the arguments for the ‘Previous Owners’ myth of Delphi (Gaia, or Apollo?) and found many pitfalls in our reliance on present evidence of ‘myth as history’. Ever-changing myth is all too ready to “fill in the spaces” perceived as lacunae by evolving societies.<sup>202</sup> Universal myth, I contend, may ‘fill in the spaces’ via testable analogies.

The conceptual Centre marked by stone, tree or chasm would be at home in Crete or on the mainland, and applicable to all oracular centres. Moreover, the sacred centre as an image of ‘completeness’ and fertility, I have argued, requires both male and female elements, such as a paired Hermes and Hestia.<sup>203</sup>

It will not be forgotten that oracular Dodona<sup>204</sup> was variously associated with Zeus, *and* Dione, an ancient goddess, Titaness, and mother of Aphrodite by Zeus;<sup>205</sup> described (but not in the context of Dodona) in Book 5 of the *Iliad*.<sup>206</sup>

This goddess’ name is possibly a feminine form of Zeus himself,<sup>207</sup> and her role as mother of sea-born Aphrodite aligns her with the watery element<sup>208</sup> and possible early cosmogonies.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1987) pp. 215-219.

<sup>203</sup> III, 39. Gernet (1981) pp. 322-339. Nagy (1990c).

<sup>204</sup> III, Dodona, pp. 15-17. Parke (1967) pp.

<sup>205</sup> Apollodorus, *Library* 1.3.1-1.4.5; Trzaskoma (2004) p. 19.

<sup>206</sup> *Il.* 5, 371, 381, 385, 416.

<sup>207</sup> Gantz (1996) pp. 12f.

<sup>208</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* 353, Dione as Oceanid.

<sup>209</sup> Hadzsits (1909).

As the author herself remarks, Apollo also had a female seer at Didyma.<sup>210</sup> Therefore *either* the simultaneous or fluctuating presence of a predominant female and / or male deity at Delphi could be expected.

Concerning the history of baetyl cult stones, Sourvinou-Inwood approximates the eighth century stone of Delphi to the Minoan cultic stones, equally decorated with fillets and associated with twin birds.<sup>211</sup> Crete certainly had a tradition of baetyl worship,<sup>212</sup> and another recording the loss of the *omphalos* (umbilical cord) of the cave-born Zeus at a place now known as Omphalion, near Knossos.<sup>213</sup> This author believes the Cretan component and its particular concept of a dying, resurrecting god contributed to the Delphic Apollo's persona.<sup>214</sup>

In such a case, there would be a traceable link between Minoan and Delphic cult practice, and traditions holding cosmological ideas in common.<sup>215</sup>

### **Throne**

We return now to possible Homeric *omphaloi*. The *Odyssey*'s symbolism of seats and thrones grants them a similar function to the beds of the epic,<sup>216</sup> which in the case of Odysseus' own, formed a prime *sema*. Thrones exhibit comparably rich trappings denoting wealth and status and also prove themselves as *omphaloi* at the base of an axis when placed beside the column or pillar.

In many cultures the throne shares the iconography of the axis and *omphalos* in so far as it is a seat raised off the ground to indicate the superiority of the occupant. It can be, for example, the lotus flower throne on the stalk that rises from the primeval mud of

<sup>210</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1987) p. 224.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. p. 225.

<sup>212</sup> Warren (1990). V, fig. 33, p. 58.

<sup>213</sup> Davaras (1976) p. 347.

<sup>214</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood (1987) p. 225. Criticised by Grottanelli (1989) p. 62.

<sup>215</sup> V.

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Nibley (1966) p. 612. The 'royal' tent of nomads served as a cosmic image of the heavens, with the bed acting as a throne. IV, 6f.

formless creation, and this stalk can arise from the *navel* of Vishnu.<sup>217</sup> Commonly it is surrounded by four beasts<sup>218</sup> or placed on four columns to indicate its position in the cosmic centre of the four gods.

The connection between the axis and a plethora of animate and inanimate forms produces such imagery as the goddess Isis herself *as the throne*, which is worn on her head like a *polos*, and consequently deified. The hieroglyph for this throne carried aloft is the empty throne of Osiris.<sup>219</sup> Moreover, a seat, stool or throne which normally supports an idol is capable of acting as a ‘power charge’ at the enthronement of a king.

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In addition, the throne-navel association gives particular point to the chairs which Odysseus occupies during his adventures and upon his return, particularly those placed beside pillars, in axis-*omphalos* combination. Kalypso allows Odysseus to sit “upon the chair from which Hermes lately / had risen” (5, 195f.), at the island ‘navel centre of the four directions’, by which means it also equates the identities of axis and ruler.<sup>221</sup> In that central position the throne could represent not only the power of the occupier but also the power of the axis, which can be accessed to exert control over temporal forces.

222

Seats close to the pillar in the epic narrative are invariably *thronoi* and distinguished from lesser furniture (*klismoi*, chairs, and *diphroi*, stools) which are used in rooms other than the dining hall.<sup>223</sup> ‘Thrones’ are the furniture of Olympos or the earthly megaron;

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *C&G.*, lotus: p. 616ff. An eight-petalled flower also associated with the eight-spoked wheel; it can hold ‘enthroned,’ the Buddha, or Mount Meru as the World Axis. Mabbett (1983).

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *C&G.*, throne: pp. 998ff. Revelations 4, 6: the throne of God having four beasts and a “sea of glass” = four directions + ‘nourishing waters’. Cf. V, fig. 74. p. 109.

<sup>219</sup> Gardiner (1994) Q1, p. 500. Cirlot, *DS* p. 34. Throne as “[variant] of the ‘Centre’.

<sup>220</sup> Thureau-Dangin (1921) pp. 144f.: the throne or pillar seat as the ‘socle of fate’. Maul (1996) p. 5 of 8 online. V, p. 105-110.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Gunnell (2001) pp. 15ff. Ibid. p. 24: Occupation of the ‘high pillar’ throne by the Norse king enabled him to ‘become’ the god. *C&G.*, throne: p. 1000. 1 Kings, 10; 18-20.

<sup>222</sup> Wensinck (1916) p. 32f. The throne at Jerusalem is a place “where order is regulated” since the navel is the throne. The Buddhist throne represents the cosmic mountain, Meru, where the king is surrounded by eight representatives, the gods of the eight directions and the four maidens of the cardinal points. Cf. Heine-Geldern (1942) p. 21.

<sup>223</sup> Van Wees (1995) p. 151, note 9.

possession, even temporary, of such a seat is a sign of honour. When Alkinoos lifts Odysseus from the ashes of the hearth and leads him to the seat on his right hand (7, 167-171) he demonstrates his acceptance of the stranger, and more: for we know that Alkinoos' throne is placed next to the pillar, like that of Arete (6, 305-7). Once seated (I interpret) Odysseus has the opportunity to share the sacralising power emanating from the pillar. But perhaps he would have done as well to sit upon one of the footstools that lie adjacent to the *thronos*-chair, for the stool bears a similar relationship to the chair as the chair to the pillar, and the *omphalos* to the axis.

The same relationship is apparent in respect of the step and the altar (the place where sacrifices rise to the heavens) in Semitic culture. In II. Chronicles 6,12f. the step or platform where the priest or king stands before the altar - which is ideationally directly above the waters of the abyss, *tehom* - is named the *kyor*, a term which may be linked to Sumerian *ki-ur*, 'foundation of the earth', that is, the navel,<sup>224</sup> and may even share its etymology with the Greek sacred pillar, the *kion*. This altar step in the temple is the foundation stone elsewhere identified with the navel stone.<sup>225</sup>

Kalypso allows Odysseus to sit in a chair which we know to be a *thronos* "that shone and glittered" (5, 86), located in a cave at the navel of the sea. Hainsworth's objection here<sup>226</sup> that Hermes is seated "*too soon*" (his italics), can be met with the notion that the god has 'beamed down' to this *omphalos*-seat; the situation would not then call for the conventional seating formula which the commentator feels to be absent at this point.<sup>227</sup> In this placement of the hero in the *omphalos*-throne is perhaps an affirmation that the hero is soon to return, like Hermes, to the upper world of light and life along the axis which is Hermes' pathway.

<sup>224</sup> Terrien (1970) p. 323, note 4.

<sup>225</sup> Isaiah 66, 1. III, pp. 59-61.

<sup>226</sup> Heubeck / Hainsworth, vol. 1, *ad. loc.*

<sup>227</sup> Pausanias 9. 39. 8 and 13, on the oracle of Trophonias in a deep cave: the visitor must drink from fountains of memory and forgetfulness, and is then seated in a "Chair of Memory".

*Gates and doorways as cosmic portals*

The gate or portal is a liminal place in which the traveller or initiand is neither of one side nor the other, but potentially in both. As a construct of two uprights framing a place of transition or becoming, the gateway incorporates twin pillars or jambs around an *omphalos* space, yet by making reference to (horizontal) entry and exit, the geometric figure becomes three-dimensional. The closest comparison would be with the crossroads<sup>228</sup> with a herm or other central marker, in which the Centre is identified by reference to the four directions, plus above and below.

The axis is very often framed by two trees, two mountains, two horsemen, two lions or other dualities who I believe express *differentiation* from the One-ness of the all-powerful axis.<sup>229</sup> The doorway in corresponding to this pattern is able to take its iconography from any and all of these flanking elements. In truth it is not possible to say which flanking element engenders a second, for we are dealing here with a fluid situation in which different craftsmen and thinkers have at different times adapted one symbol to another or layered several together, as best suited their artistic agenda and their individual artistic constraints. Therefore we shall meet doorways which are compounded of trees, pillars, obelisks, animals or mountains, not immediately obvious for what they are, but the presence of the other accoutrements of the axis (fire, serpents, water, celestial birds, and the passage between them of a voyaging soul) will assist in confirming the identification. Whatever its components, the doorway is a powerful image of the entrance to Heaven, and is remembered as such in all religious iconography, even to the traditional work of the people in embroidery and carpet weaving.<sup>230</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Cf. the universal symbolism of 'crossroads' and their signposts, or market crosses (meaning, Justice or fair trading), often raised on three platforms (= 'planes'). C. & G., crossroads: pp. 257-261.

<sup>229</sup> A tripartite scheme; cf. V, pp. 19-21; 42f.; 44-46; 75-77. Wensinck (1921) p. 6, on types fixed by tradition.

<sup>230</sup> Cf. Embroidery: Denisova (2001); Persian carpets: Cammann (1975) pp. 195-198.

In the following figures, portals are marked by the flagstaffs of the goddess (III, 8) or *ashera*-style pillars (III, 9), whilst a second Egyptian example places closed doorleaves on the mountains of the horizon, where the sun disk is generally shown (III, 10).<sup>231</sup>

Fig. III, 8.

Egypt: Sacred precinct of the goddess Neith.  
Abydos, ivory. (2920-2649).  
Two flagstaffs identify the entrance to the sacred sphere.  
Keel (1978) p. 160. fig. 220a.



Fig. III, 9.

Assyrian: two *ashera*.  
Astarte temple model.  
Idalion, Cyprus. 8-7<sup>th</sup>. centuries .  
Louvre, AOB, no. 523.  
Keel (1978) p. 165 fig. 225.

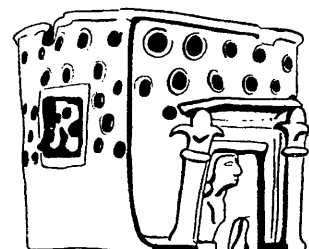
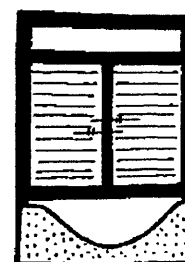


Fig. III, 10.

Egypt: Closed gate of the sun over mountains of the horizon.  
Papyrus (*Book of the Dead*)  
New Kingdom 1550-1070.  
Keel (1978) p. 24 no. 10.



The contexts of these motifs indicate that these are no ordinary gates or doorways. They are “cosmic portals”.<sup>232</sup> When discussing the “Distant Portal” of the Laistrygonian

<sup>231</sup> V, figs. 5, 6, 8, 9. pp. 22f.

<sup>232</sup> West, *East* pp. 406f.

lands, Martin West is struck by the correspondence with *Gilgamesh*, where the hero passes through the mountains of the sun before reaching Siduri's shore-dwelling; just so does Odysseus arrive at the island of Circe (daughter of Helios) immediately after leaving the Laistrygones' cosmic doorway. West reminds us of further parallels in the *Argonautica* and in Near Eastern legends of Ishtar.<sup>233</sup>

It is important to note that the doorway takes its cosmic power from the axial references of the containing door jambs or pillars which express the emergent Duad. Cirlot refers to them as symbols of eternal stability, and the space between them, as the entrance to eternity.<sup>234</sup> This symbolism will be invaluable in the interpretation of the *Odyssey*'s many gates and portals, and of some images in the Minoan and Mycenaean repertoire.

Near to Hades lie the "gates of the Helios the Sun" (24, 12) which are by-passed by the descending souls of the suitors. Odysseus is not among those wretched shades, but we see him closely associated with other symbolic thresholds which reflect the liminality of his position, 'between worlds'. The symbolism does not rest with the *oikos*, however, but extends into the geographic sphere of his adventures, many of which are located at the ends of the earth.<sup>235</sup>

It is at the distant horizon that the time of the sun's rising can best be observed, and the place of rising can be measured on land against a mountain profile, or, at sea, against the horizon. Since dawn and sunset are the ancient liminal times of sacrifice, these points of rising and setting are crucial, and in Near Eastern and Asiatic traditions<sup>236</sup> have come to be mythologised as 'Sungates' that give access to the Otherworld. The door motif has a long association with the 'habitation' of the Sun god.<sup>237</sup>

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. p. 407.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. Cirlot, *DS* column: pp. 60f. The two pillars of the Sephirothic tree (Kabbalah) mean 'stablish, be strong'. Cf. *Il.* 5, 749ff.; 8, 393ff.: Hera and Athene pass through the gates of the sky.

<sup>235</sup> IV.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Door* pp. 6-61.

<sup>237</sup> Goldman (1966) p. 69. Ibid. p. 74f.: a mountain's twin peaks = the posts of the door, and the divine



The most powerful Sungates are those of the winter and summer solstices,<sup>238</sup> the turning points of the sun, which in Hindu symbolism are respectively the Way of the Gods (initiating ascent, the time of winter re-generation and rebirth) and the Way of Men, or the Ancestors (descent, towards the death of the former life).<sup>239</sup>

The *Odyssey* contains many significant portals whose immanent power may well derive from the old imagery of the Sungate. In particular, the manner in which individuals respond to the doorway characterises them as either respectful of the gods or indifferent to them. Whilst Telemachos greets the stranger who proves to be Athene with the utmost courtesy required by the rules of *xenia* (1,118-131), Melanthios can offer no more than insults and blows to the beggar who approaches Odysseus' dwelling (17, 212-34). Not for the Odysseus of the opening books is the seat of polished stones which maintain the authority of Nestor at the gates of *his* house (3, 406ff.),<sup>240</sup> nor yet will Athene see him as she longs to, with helmet and spear, in his own doorway (1, 255-8).

Resolution of the conflict in Ithaka is presented as a series of advances towards the goal of reunion with the hero's wife; one doorway conflict after another translates the crossing of symbolic thresholds towards the final threshold of Penelope's heart. Iros must be displaced from his brutish occupation of the doorway and set, in parody of kingship with staff in hand (18, 103), against the lesser portico doors of the courtyard. The master is then able to make the space his own in subsequent disputes.

Telemachos chooses the doorway for the trial of strength and character, the stringing of the bow (21, 124) and leaves the bow in the doorway. It is also from the doorway that Odysseus begins his onslaught on the suitors, "atop the great threshold"

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doorkeepers. West, *East* pp. 142f. assembles 'Sungates' from a wider Near Eastern context.

<sup>238</sup> C&G., solstices: pp. 891f.

<sup>239</sup> Cf. Guénon, *FS* pp. 239-242. Cancer is the gateway of men ('the fathers') and Capricorn, diametrically opposite, the gateway of the gods, since the sun appears to descend from Cancer to Capricorn and then to re-ascend towards Cancer. p. 240f. IV, p. 27, fig. 9. Cf. Homer's gates of North and South in the Cave of the Nymphs.

<sup>240</sup> White stones are typically *omphalos* markers. III, pp. 59-61.

(22, 2) with such success that in a short time the bodies are stacked alongside that of Iros (23, 49).

In the course of the narrative Odysseus reveals himself as one with an exceptional control over openings of all kinds. His role in the episode of the Wooden Horse,<sup>241</sup> for example, places him inside among “the greatest / of the Argives” (4, 272f.), yet he it is who silences the impulsive ones responding to the voice of Helen (4, 284) and he too who is appointed ‘door-keeper’ (11, 524f.). It is due above all to Odysseus’ resourcefulness and strategy that the companions are not trapped within the cave of Polyphemos.

Ill-mannered behaviour at the doorway is enough to delineate at one stroke the negative character of one or more individuals, in defiance of *xenia*, from Skylla who fishes the shipwrecked companions out of the sea and eats them in her own doorway (12, 256), to the unworthy suitors of Penelope who use the doorway for their idle gambling activities (1, 106-9).

The stone or wooden doorway seems to function in the same way as paired or split mountains, as a liminal place of transition, possibly to another world.

In respect of Odysseus and his relationship with the doorway, the poet has been hinting at much more grandiose encounters with celestial portals. In the course of his adventures the hero must visit and escape from a number of dangerous openings, which do indeed claim the lives of his companions, between the twin mountains of the Cyclopean island and the Island of Goats, for example, and in the deadly embrace of the Laistrygonian split mountain (in the two promontories of the harbour). As the narrative progresses and takes the travellers to Hades and back, past the Sirens and on to the hazards of Skylla and Charybdis, the poet revives the story of the Symplegades, the clashing rocks of the Argonaut adventure (12, 55-110). This gives the audience a

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<sup>241</sup> Andersen (1977) p. 14.

context for understanding the two rocks of Skylla and Charybdis, which do not close in together, but are closely paired and share many of the attributes of the Argonautic model. “We sailed up the narrow strait lamenting” (12, 234).

Gilgamesh makes a journey similar to that of Odysseus:

“[he] came from Uruk-eanna,  
who wound a way round the mountains,  
the hidden road where rises the sun” (tablet iv. 9-11, from Sivar).

He approaches the end of the world and prepares to encounter Utnapishtim who has the secret of immortal life. This is where Gilgamesh finds him:

“To Mashu’s twin mountains he came,	[=doorway]
which daily guard the rising [sun],	
whose tops [support] the fabric of heaven,	[=axes]
whose base reaches down to the Netherworld”.	[=omphalos]

(tablet ix, 38-41, standard version).<sup>242</sup>

The scorpion men who guard the mountain are surprised to see him:

“never did anyone [travel the path] of the mountain...  
For twelve double hours its interior [extends,]  
the darkness is dense, and [light is] there none.”

[= light myth]

(tablet ix, 81-83, standard version).<sup>243</sup>

The pair of mountains constituting a door giving access to a new spiritual life is a well-established story element.<sup>244</sup> It is the ‘Open Sesame’ motif. The leaves of the doors may be rolling mountains, icebergs, razor-edged reeds, jaws,<sup>245</sup> floating islands or rocks, but it is ultimately upward or towards the sun that the soul will find the ‘Sundoor’ or ‘World Door’ which will afford admittance to a new life. The route to the door is along the mountain, the pillar, the tree, or sacrificial post, all forms of the *axis mundi*. These are concrete forms of an abstract concept translated into ‘image-able’ shapes.

<sup>242</sup> *Gilgamesh* trans. George (2000) p. 80.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p. 71. Egyptian mythology has sky-supporting twin mountains in both east and west. Combined in a single symbol for the horizon, they also signified *rebirth*. Rambova (1957) pp. 30f.

<sup>244</sup> A. B. Cook (1940) *Zeus*, III, ii, Appendix P, pp. 975-1016. “an ancient popular belief in a doorway to the Otherworld formed by clashing rocks”. p. 976. Coomaraswamy, *Symplegades*.

<sup>245</sup> RV X, LXXXVII, 3.

Nevertheless there are chronological and solar dimensions to the metaphor which take us back to the *Odyssey*. For the Rocks also configure as Day and Night in *Rg Veda* where they are described as “clashing together and parting”.<sup>246</sup> The two indicate the fragile, fleeting time when it is neither Day nor Night, but dawn or sunset; those moments are experienced in terms of the sun’s movements on the horizon. Only briefly, if at all, is it neither Day nor Night, and then it is that sacrifice must be made, for this is a liminal space and time in which the world of the gods is briefly accessible.<sup>247</sup> In other sources, the aspirant soul must pass beyond the dazzling rays of the sun (spokes of a sun wheel), into “*the land of darkness beyond the sun*”.<sup>248</sup> (The parallel with Odysseus’ directional dilemma will be evident).

The transformative doorway is a *leitmotiv* to Odysseus’ Adventures at home and abroad, and it will be seen in section IV, the key to the course of his spiritual journey.

### ***Sacred oxhide, sacred shield***

On the eve of his battle with the suitors which will confirm his homecoming, Odysseus sleeps fitfully on the ground in the courtyard, on “the raw hide of an ox”, with fleeces and a blanket (20, 1-3). “Taking the oxhide / out, [he] laid it down” (95-7) and addressed to Zeus his prayer for guidance. The implication is that the hide has a particular role in communication with the gods. That it is an effective aid is proved by the immediate response in the form of a series of omens (105-119).

What values attach to the skin of an ox? <sup>249</sup> In the *Odyssey* we have the chilling episode of the skins of cattle that refuse to die, which “crawled” and “bellowed, / both roast and raw” (12, 394f.). The hide would seem to be immortal.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Symplegades* p. 471f.

<sup>247</sup> *KaB* II. 9. Coomaraswamy, *Symplegades* p. 473.

<sup>248</sup> *JUB* 1. 3, 5-6. Coomaraswamy, *Door* p. 10. IV, pp. 7f.

<sup>249</sup> Gaster (1950) p. 377, text and notes. Magical value of fleeces, hung on poles. Placing the foot on a fleece could suffice for self-purification. Regeneration of bodies in hides, hung in trees.

The oxhide product is depicted in the hands only of those whom the narrative has portrayed as worthy and god-fearing. On our first meeting with Eumaios he is working “well-coloured” hide for his sandal but drops it - suitably- when he hastens to subdue the dog fight which threatens Odysseus (14, 23f.). The audience’s initial encounter with the suitors in book one shows these idlers in the very opposite light, seated on the skins of cattle and “amusing their spirits with draughts games” (1, 106ff.); what is more, they are sitting “in front of the doors”. In contrast, the herald Medon saves his own life during the battle with the suitors by taking refuge under “the hide of an ox, freshly skinned” (22,363). This episode reminds us of Menelaos’ adventure with the Old Man of the Sea and the seal skins which concealed him and his companions (4, 435-53): “all were newly skinned” (437). It is, needless to say, a ram and its fleecy hide which protects Odysseus as he emerges from the Cyclop’s cave.

Oxhide constitutes the protective layers of the shield; in this sense we may say that the ox protects the man.<sup>250</sup> Burkert has spoken of the wearing of ox skins as an attempt by the conqueror of the bull to become identical with the bull.<sup>251</sup> An element of divine protection may be attributed to the artefact from the ‘substance of the bull’ worked into the shield’s frame. The bull, it will be argued,<sup>252</sup> represents, or equates to, axial solar power, and enclosure within the bull, to the sacred space of the *omphalos*. In the Egyptian cult of Sabazios, and in the Osiris mysteries, a fawn skin was worn by initiates in token of rebirth into immortality.<sup>253</sup> The oxhide may have exerted a similar power in Greek tradition.

*Rhinoi*, a rare terminology, clash together in the *Iliad* (4, 447-9) skin to skin; and it is to be as a shield, *rhinon*, that Scheria first appears to Odysseus (5, 281). Homer gives

<sup>250</sup> Odysseus wears a helmet of bull’s hide beneath his boar’s tusk helmet in *Il.* 10, 257f.; Diomedes sleeps on the “hide of a field ranging ox” (*Il.* 10, 155) before the night raid of the *Doloneia*.

<sup>251</sup> Burkert (1983) p. 167. Ibid. p. 14, the oxhide represents regeneration, since the god (Zeus) transformed himself into a bull.

<sup>252</sup> V, pp. 82-85.

<sup>253</sup> Oesterley (1935) p. 145.

us “bellowing shields” at various points in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, using the verb *mukaomai*, to low or bellow, for the sound generated by a shield when struck.<sup>254</sup> The same verb (*mukon*) is used of the gates of the sky that open to Hera’s chariot (*Il.* 5, 748f.; *Il.* 8, 392f.) and when the doors of Odysseus’ storeroom sound “as a bull bellows” (21, 48-50) the verb is *anebrache*, deployed also in the sound made by Achilles’ shield as it passes into the hero’s hands (*Il.* 19, 13).

There would seem to be a pattern here intimating that the sacred bull (or his perceived qualities) was present in the hide wherever it was used for a worthy purpose, and that the divinity expressed its favours in the voice of a bull. From this it follows that the shield refers to cosmic power, and knowing that such power finds multiple symbolic forms, it is not difficult to interpret the metaphoric designation of Scheria as “the shield upon the water.”<sup>255</sup> The island is marked as a sanctified location where the ‘bull’ power that flows through the divine axis will penetrate the *omphalos*-boss at the centre of the shield, Scheria itself, which rises mountainously<sup>256</sup> towards the heavens from an isolated centre in the waters of chaos.

### ***The capstone: ‘White Rock’***<sup>257</sup>

The approach to Hades is marked by a rock or stone; Odysseus is told by Circe that he must seek the entrance to Hades at the point where two rivers meet. “There is / a rock there, and the junction<sup>258</sup> of two thunderous rivers” (10, 514f.). This in all likelihood is the White Rock (*Leukas petra*) of book twenty four (11) that stands

<sup>254</sup> *Il.* 20, 260; *Il.* 20, 277.

<sup>255</sup> Aeschylus, *Seven against Thebes* 496, has the sky as a “hollow bellied shield”. Perhaps the ‘bull island’, Minoan Crete, provided a model for Homer’s mythic Scheria.

<sup>256</sup> 5, 279.

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Denisova (2001) pp. 1005ff.: The (Russian) white Alatyir stone: an analogue of Paradise, fiery source of limitless power, and charms; p. 1007: “flowing from the four cardinal points”; p. 1012: “situated at the sea’s umbilical cord”. Cf. Cirlot, *DS* centre: pp. 41f., the ‘stone at the centre’; *ibid.* p. 315, stone-circle.

<sup>258</sup> ‘Junction’ is redolent of the Vedic ‘parting of the ways’ in the Pit. **Appendix 2, pp. 5-7.**

between the Ocean Stream and the gates of Helios the Sun,<sup>259</sup> and precedes “the country of dreams”...and “the meadow of asphodel” (12-13) on the itinerary of the gibbering shades of the dead suitors. Ballabriga sees Cape Leukas at the western extreme of the Greek world as a frontier between the worlds of the living and the dead,<sup>260</sup> an interpretation which fits equally well the white rock situated close to Homer’s world of the dead, whilst Nagler gives an unequivocal interpretation of the same White Rock of Leukas as “a faded omphalos or axis symbol”.<sup>261</sup>

The white *omphalos* stone at Delphi is a case in point. Pausanias<sup>262</sup> narrates: “What is called the omphalos by the Delphians is made of white marble, and is said by the Delphians to be the centre of all the earth, and Pindar,<sup>263</sup> in one of his odes, confirms the notion”. Further information from Hesiod<sup>264</sup> establishes that this stone was also that swallowed by Kronos in place of the infant Zeus, who later set it firm in a cleft beneath twin-peaked Parnassos, to be a *sema*. By this association the stone relates to power at the navel-place.<sup>265</sup>

The stone placed at or astride the entrance is both a marker of the underworld<sup>266</sup> and a defence against the floodwaters which might rise from the abyss, causing a flood. Whilst water is an emblem of fertility and creation, it also represents formlessness, the chaos of the primal world that preceded the imposition of order. The sweet waters of land and mountains are the products of Mother Earth,<sup>267</sup> but the sea operates on a more violent and masculine principle, as we see in the raging Poseidon of the *Odyssey*.

<sup>259</sup> Nagy (1973) p. 140. The Gates of the Sun are also the gates of the underworld, where the sun passes through the darkness before dawning in the east.

<sup>260</sup> Ballabriga (1986) p. 54.

<sup>261</sup> Nagler (1996) p. 146, note 15.

<sup>262</sup> Pausanias, 10. 16. 13.

<sup>263</sup> Pindar, *IV Pythian*, 74. trans. Lattimore, p. 60: Delphi as the “naveled centre of leafy Earth, our mother”.

<sup>264</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony* trans. Wender, p. 39, lines 498-500.

<sup>265</sup> The *omphalos* as a World Centre is perpetuated internationally in other cult stones such as the Celtic Stone of Fàil. Cf. Michell (1994) p. 140f.

<sup>266</sup> The Roman town or encampment was centred on the *mundus*, a trench or pit, which defined the point where the lines of the *cardo* (N/S) crossed the *decumanus* (E/W). Mythically connected to the underworld, the *mundus* was topped with ‘a stone of souls’, lifted periodically. Cf. Rykwert (1999) pp. 202: “the Roman who walked the *cardo* knew that his walk was the axis around which the sun turned”.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Eliade, *Patterns* pp. 191f.

De Santillana and von Dechend<sup>268</sup> identify in the navel-stone mythology a basic scheme which has world-wide variants. The removal of the 'navel-capstone', whatever its form, results in the opening of a great hole into the underworld around which the waters swirl. Equally possible is the rising of a surge from the abyss, which must be blocked to save the world's inhabitants.

The many legends in which white cliffs or white rocks (*Leukas* or *Skyros*) are linked to ritual death, with humans leaping from them or sacrificial animals hurled downward, indicate the general conception that the White Stone, as a cover to the *omphalos* or the *omphalos* itself, marks the entrance to the Underworld. A leap towards the underworld from such a white cliff face would be appropriate to suicide and sacrifice to the gods, or the mythic descent of solar figures into the western horizon of the sunset.<sup>269</sup>

These readings open the way towards an understanding of Odysseus' descent to Hades, where he must pass the white stone in the first *Nekyia*, as an initiatic stage in a ritual drama. His 'escape' in this context amounts to a rebirth or a transition from one state of being to another, via the axis, in a sequence that relies upon the acquisition of knowledge through trial and survival.

### *The Cave*

Corresponding to the pattern of an empty space enclosed by a rock is the cave of Polyphemos. This episode constitutes an outstanding example of the transgression of that hospitality (*xenia*) ordained by Zeus and so often illustrated in the epic context, and thus it has long been read.<sup>270</sup> But behind the imagery of the *inhospitable*, thus *anti-divine*, lurks the tradition of the chthonic beast. The cave is to be the site of the hero's victory over a type of giant who represents a negative force similar to that exemplified

<sup>268</sup> Cf. De Santillana and von Dechend (1977) pp. 213f.

<sup>269</sup> It is also relevant to the choice of 'western' Ithaka, adjacent to Cape Leukas, as a World Centre.

<sup>270</sup> Heubeck, *ad. loc.*



by the dragon or winged serpent, or the Minotaur.<sup>271</sup> The cave is a prototype of an Underworld with an inherent evil. When Odysseus raises the great timber to pierce this monster, he fulfils the exemplar in which Marduk destroys Tiamat<sup>272</sup> or the Pharaoh raises the *djed* pillar.<sup>273</sup> The eye, so often a solar symbol,<sup>274</sup> is a hollow *omphalos*, which being reconnected to the vertical, transforms from destructive to beneficial power via the establishment of *cosmic order*.

The cave of Kalypso at the navel of the sea (1, 50), we shall show, is the departure point for Odysseus' return via the axis to the realm of light, his *nostos*. Moreover, Porphyry in his *de Antro Nympharum* treats the Odyssean Cave of the Nymphs as an image of the cosmos, complete with dual paths towards rebirth which he connects with the summer and winter 'gates' of Cancer and Capricorn.<sup>275</sup> Homer, he recognises, treats gates as sacred (citing *Il.* 9, 581ff.) and reminds us of customs that require gates to be passed through in silence. Therefore there is some cause to test all Homer's caves as potential cosmic metaphors.

If the cave is a chthonic *omphalos*, it follows that the boulder that closes the cave entrance is a doublet of the 'capstone' White Rock. The enclosing boulder, described as "a piece of sky-towering cliff" (9, 243), confirms this. It is a landscape of cosmic proportions, where the guardian of the door is as threatening as Circe and as controlling as Kalypso. The monstrous cliff-shifter and his Laistrygonian equivalents will hurl great boulders at the departing adventurers. These will fall respectively between the island of Polyphemos and the Island of Goats, and then between the two 'arms' of the Laistrygonian bay. These locations, in the second instance, prove to be places of death

<sup>271</sup> Cf. Tresidder, *Symbols* giant: p. 90. Dragons are frequently at home in caves, both being chthonic elements.

<sup>272</sup> *The Babylonian Creation*, IV. trans. Sandars (1971) p. 91f. *ibid.* V, p. 93: "through [Tiamat's] ribs he opened the gates of the east and west".

<sup>273</sup> **Appendix 2, pp. 7-10.**

<sup>274</sup> Cf. *C.&G.*, eye: p. 364.

<sup>275</sup> Porphyry, trans. Taylor, pp. 309ff.

to many of the sailors, just as the cave of Polyphemos stopped with a boulder was the location of the Cyclops' cannibalistic murder of several companions. Since both constitute portals or doorways, the projectiles (which again are of mountainous proportions: 9, 481-6, 537-42), about to sink to the bottom of the sea, occupy the same mythic spectrum as the White Rock which closes the entrance to the Underworld, and the Phaiakian ship transmuted to stone. They will play their part in closing to the condemned sailors the several portals of life which could have granted access to the Otherworld, and their souls' rebirth.

### *The Two Ways or Paths*

A 'way' cannot be an *omphalos*, but those paths that associate with the axis lead either upward to the heavens, or downward to the Underworld, blending in the process at upper or lower points, creating junctions represented by a prominent *stone, or house, or its threshold*. So, the White Rock at the junction of "two thundering rivers" defines, by concealment, the aperture leading to the underworld. A rock is likewise the marker to the 'parting of the rivers' seen as a 'parting of the ways' <sup>276</sup> in Hindu literature, where there stands a pillar, the *locus* of the separation of the unity into opposing polarities. In the Old Testament (as in the Sanskrit mythology of Pusan who falls towards, and rises from, a low turning point) the terminology of the place of the dead is a 'Pit'. <sup>277</sup>

The lowest point of any form functioning as a microcosm of cosmic order is the source of the Two Paths, such as the conjoined tails of the caduceus which spiral in opposite directions. <sup>278</sup> They may similarly formulate the lowest *chakra*, from which the opposing energy spirals, *nadi*, form diametric revolutions around the *shushumna*, the

<sup>276</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 5-7. Mesopotamian literature has the Way of Anu (to the stars) and the Way of Enki / El (to the Abyss). The ways pass through 'celestial gates'. W. F. Warren (1901) p. 140.

<sup>277</sup> West, *East* p. 159f.

<sup>278</sup> V, fig. 7. p. 22.

central artery of the spine in Buddhist practice.<sup>279</sup> Therefore ‘river’ and ‘way’ and ‘spine’ share a root identity. We may even extend the image of dual pathways to include its configuration as twin horsemen, or the twin brothers whose sibling-companion is the Sun;<sup>280</sup> for all are capable of standing as representatives of the two solar paths.

‘The two ways’ are found in the *Odyssey* as the two entrances to the Cave of the Nymphs, the one of ‘people’ (13, 110) facing the North Wind, and the other of the immortals (112) facing the South Wind, which “has more divinity”(111). In this episode the Cave is the cosmic cavern from which there emerge two routes to spiritual progress, each flowing in contrary directions.<sup>281</sup> They follow the axis, but are not the axis. They appear to be further reflections of the ‘twin’ phenomenon of various paired objects which reflect the metaphysical principle of the One that divides and returns into itself.

### *Footnote*

Having explored many possible textual riddles based on the typology of the *axis mundi*, the next task must be to examine ways in which such motifs are worked into the larger theme of Journey and Return. To do so requires analysis of the course and purpose of the hero’s eventful journey.

<sup>279</sup> Cf. Butterworth, *Tree* p. 166, plate XVI: *chakras*.

<sup>280</sup> Dowden (1992) p. 59.

<sup>281</sup> BG 8. 24-28, links the solstice gates to the gates of gods and men: from **fire, light, daytime, summer**, the “knowers of Brahman” go forth; from **smoke, night, winter**, the *yogin* proceeds. BG 8, 26: “By one [path] man goes to non-return, By the other he returns again”. Cf. Proverbs 4, 18f.

## ***Section IV. The Cosmic Journey of Odysseus***

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*Myth and reality*

This section will explore ways in which the poet uses myth and reality. The emphasis will be upon establishing an even more profound application of the symbolic mode, which extends into the very structure of the poem. The cosmos as perceived by the poet is more than physical reality: it appears to provide a means of understanding divine intention and a pattern for the conduct of affairs of men.

\*

The physical features of the earth as described by Homer readily accrue mythic detail, to the extent that it is difficult to separate the accurate from the speculative. Homer is correct in his description of the fixed point of the Bear (the Wagon), “who turns about in a fixed place” (5, 274, the eternally visible Polar Star of the northern hemisphere on which the mythic axis hinges). There are hints, too, of solstice locations in the description of Syria (15, 403f.), but no ‘island’ can lie there, nor can the paradisaical lifestyle hold good in reality.

Thus the course of Odysseus’ wanderings and adventures is an enduring puzzle: how are the epic’s apparent geographical ‘matches’ (such as Ithaka,<sup>1</sup> and Crete<sup>2</sup>) to be reconciled to the ‘fantasy islands’ of Kalypso or the Phaiakians, and especially those where directional markers are obscured, such as Circe’s island (10, 190f.) and the land of the Kimmerians (11, 14-19) ?

Strabo<sup>3</sup> struggled to maintain the historicity of Homer’s geography whilst facing the many inconsistencies, recognising that only a comprehensive explanation would satisfy;<sup>4</sup> for him, the mythic element was an entertainment for the masses, “a sweetening”,<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Od.* 9, 21-28; 13, 96-112, 195f., 241-247.

<sup>2</sup> *Od.* 19, 172-179, 338f.; *Il.* 2, 645-649.

<sup>3</sup> Strabo, *Geographia*: Odysseus’ wanderings as historical fact: 1. 2. 3- 43; 3. 2. 13; 3. 4. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 1, 2. 18.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* I, 2. 9.

intended to make the truth more palatable.<sup>6</sup> Geography prior to the Hellenistic age having been largely a matter of travellers' tales, literature and science were barely distinguished, and whilst the debate simmered Homer was largely inviolable, the epics being held in deep respect. Pausanias peopled his real, personally-experienced landscapes with gods and heroes of the mythic past, further demonstrating the subjectivity of the geographer's art in his time.

Modern voyagers such as Tim Severin<sup>7</sup> have since reversed the process by travelling 'book in hand' in search of Odyssean concordances with tide and landscape. Severin's 'matches' rely on coincidences of folklore and hearsay, topography and text, but to explain the later adventures of the single ship, the author has to postulate influence from a separate Ionian epic cycle.<sup>8</sup>

In contrast, Pocock broaches the problem as a classicist with faith in Homeric allegory, who argues that legends concerning Odysseus' adventures go back to Mycenaean times and contain knowledge of that territory.<sup>9</sup> He places the *Odyssey* later than the poems of Hesiod and is thereby able to expand the interpretation, of Circe's island for example, by reference to the other poet's (mythical) locations and some real topography, especially that of Sicily.<sup>10</sup>

The disadvantage of these and other similar reconstructions is that they rest on too many unverifiable facts. The epic text as we have it may have been corrupted by mistranslations or recensions, but I believe it is ultimately more reliable than other bases of comparison and has the advantage of providing material for in-depth contextual study.

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<sup>6</sup> Romm (1992) pp. 190ff.

<sup>7</sup> Severin (1987).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pp. 138, 240.

<sup>9</sup> Pocock (1959) p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. pp. 33-39.

It would be no cause for wonder if the Homeric poet, for whom 'scientific accuracy' would be an anachronism, had adopted an eclectic approach, interweaving the actual with the mythical, blending experience and imagination, enlivening his text with fables and marvels for the immediate delight of his audience, performing, in short, the regular business of the artist. The scope and density of the epic are surely sufficient to contain both fiction and actuality, religion and social reality, light entertainment and possibly an *encryption* of secrets for the initiated.

***Direction and location***

First to be considered are the ways in which direction could be described in early cultures. The present literate world, having an imprinted mental image of an atlas page, screen, sundial or compass face, envisages direction chiefly as a two-directional phenomenon. Without this form of education, I believe direction would have been experienced 'in the round'. Homer attaches direction to the names of the stars or the winds, which must occupy three dimensions. Stars are clearly 'above', and winds occupy both the level plane and the vertical. Consequently, in naming the North, either the north of our map directions and / or *the north of the skies in the entire upper hemisphere* could be intended. There is opportunity here for considerable ambiguity as well as some alternative interpretations of Homeric geography.

Okeanos as the possible generative force <sup>11</sup> also provides a fitting location for idealistic concepts of 'eternity' or for the movement of men through 'maritime chaos' and disorder, out of the mundane world and into the divine. The 'Great River' may well serve to delineate the margin of an 'ex-oceanic' <sup>12</sup> world, to be understood as *ultra real*.

An encircling river is required in order to set an outer limit to the known world of men, and to define the frontier with the unknown, which must (by default) be the world of the deity. Hence Homer gives us the mighty poetic image of the Shield of Achilles where a comprehensive picture of the earth and its many polarities is enclosed within the ocean. The circle is a symbol of completeness. It will be shown that the same circle is to be discovered in the wanderings of Odysseus through metaphoric islands, and, moreover, that the fulfilment of the circle is of political and personal importance to the hero and his society.

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<sup>11</sup> III, pp. 6-8.

<sup>12</sup> Ballabriga (1998) "exocéanisme" p. 136, *passim*.



### *The circular journey: historical contexts*

#### *'Royal progress'*

The circular cosmic pattern is not the sole prerogative of epic adventurers. In societies which organised their social patterns sympathetically or mimetically in accordance with those of the heavens ("hierocentric" societies),<sup>13</sup> the administration of territory (which will here be called 'a royal progress', whatever the status of the leadership) customarily began at the winter solstice, then moved in a circular journey through the land until returning to the point of origin at the following winter solstice.<sup>14</sup> On the way, justice was administered, tribute collected, and alliances affirmed. During the journey, the tent served as accommodation, and all goods including effigies of the gods were transported in or on wheeled carts.<sup>15</sup> Consequently the early iconography of sacred objects reflected the nomadic way of life in which it arose, particularly the wheel, the chariot of the sun, the tent as the dome of heaven with its sustaining pole, and the bed as a 'throne'. And since it was the *oasis* which constituted the nomadic ideal of refuge, it was the fertile, well-watered garden that provided the image of paradise to travelling people. Since the cattle of the nomad are necessarily associated with this life-giving water, the *bucranium* came to represent not only the herd but the gathering in all its aspects.<sup>16</sup>

Where communities were still nomadic, the annual assembly was an occasion for trading: a 'fair,' a religious gathering, an athletic contest and a political event. Nilsson, too, has underlined the importance of this *panegyris* in the development of the state and its religion.<sup>17</sup> As a major institution, says Nibley,<sup>18</sup> it was replicated *in parvo* at any location which was perceived as central to the universe, a 'navel-meeting place of the

<sup>13</sup> Nibley (1951).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. pp. 226ff. His conclusions are based on comparisons of the earliest known societies and the pre-settlement nomadic way of life. Also Nibley (1966) pp. 609-612, on the 'Royal Progress.'

<sup>15</sup> Nibley (1966) pp. 601-605.

<sup>16</sup> Nibley (1951) p. 236.

<sup>17</sup> Nilsson (1963) pp. 259ff.

<sup>18</sup> Nibley (1951) pp. 226-250.

four directions', at a shrine for example, or any place suitable for the celebration of the New Year drama in which the 'king' was ritually re-installed. Thus it is feasible to suppose that the cosmic rhythm was deeply ingrained in the consciousness of early man, and in consequence, a circular journey for a culture hero such as Odysseus would be a natural event, not for him in the capacity of the sun itself, but as a king accomplishing a politico-religious duty according to a solar pattern.

### *The dislocation of time*

To understand Odysseus' adventures as a spiritual journey, I believe the aspect of time has to be included as a supplement to the other dimensions, those of space. We know that his return to Penelope will be achieved at the turn of the year, on the feast of Apollo;<sup>19</sup> but he appears to step in and out of time in the course of his wanderings.<sup>20</sup>

In Hindu thinking, true rebirth is not the cycle of reincarnation, for that is physical imprisonment; to be reborn in spirit requires *escape from time*. Time in the ancient world had to be measured by the movements of the sun, hence a search for the beginning of time in the substance of the One Spirit must be defined by sun and non-sun. Thus the *Maitri Upanishad*: "What precedes the Sun is timeless and undivided; but what begins with the Sun is Time that has divisions, and its form is the year..."<sup>21</sup> Escape from the cycles of birth is accomplished by entry, through enlightenment, into the transcendental world where, for the 'liberated' sage, the sun stands still. This timeless Centre, at the centre of the vault and the rupture of three planes,<sup>22</sup> is I believe, the goal of Odysseus' journey. 'Sunless' or 'shadowless' locations would mark crucial stages in his progress towards that point.<sup>23</sup>

There have been many interpretations of the directional confusion arising from the

<sup>19</sup> 21, 288f.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. sleeping between destinations; return to point of departure, in his account of the Adventures.

<sup>21</sup> *MU VII*, 11, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Eliade, *Images* p. 73-77.

<sup>23</sup> Circe's island; Kimmerian lands; Skylla's rock.

absence of sun or moon. The most helpful and relevant explanation is to my mind the Vedic concept of the axis which passes through the sun.<sup>24</sup> The sun is always at the conceptual centre of the universe, and though not at the top, always 'above' and 'at the top of the tree'.<sup>25</sup> What cannot be conveyed geometrically however, is the mystic 'seventh ray' (the "one foot" of the sun) which passes beyond the sun and cannot be seen by the physical eye. This ray coincides with the axis of the universe and reaches up into the suprasolar world, "where no sun shines",<sup>26</sup> because all that lies beyond the sun is immortal. Inevitably, not being of this world, the ray casts no shadow.

### *New Year Rituals*

The hero's absence from his kingdom which is so dramatically tied to the sufferings of his wife Penelope at the hands of the indigent suitors has at its core distinct echoes of rituals of New Year renewal. At the year's beginning the royal pair, in Indo-European custom, traditionally celebrated the *hieros gamos*, mimetic of the union of heaven and earth. The interim of old year / new year was a liminal time in which the old king was 'lost' or 'exiled',<sup>27</sup> and took with him into this 'disruption of time' the prosperity of his land. 'Liminality' was a major element in early mysticism in which time and location (in the form of solar movements) were all-important in defining the optimum moment for communication with the gods. Dawn and sunset, we recall, provided an in-between time, neither day nor night, when a brief moment of non-time allowed the Vedic sacrificer to pass through from one world to the other.<sup>28</sup>

### *Liminality and Initiation*

Far from being a random peregrination of the Mediterranean shores, I believe

<sup>24</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Door* pp. 197ff., and note 11. A full explanation of the doctrine.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 197.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. p. 198.

<sup>27</sup> Woodard (2002) pp. 91-98.

<sup>28</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Door* pp. 6-10.

Odysseus' journey follows a time-honoured circular and sunwise course in pursuit of the enlightenment that comes at the end of a dedicated pilgrimage<sup>29</sup> to a spiritual centre.

Victor Turner's<sup>30</sup> African experience, in the field, of van Gennep's (1960) *rites de passage* provides a picture of the essential stages of initiation in traditional societies. There is a striking resemblance to Odysseus' own journeying, set out here in brackets.

From stage one, *separation* (departure from Ithaka, then Troy, defeat by the Kikones) the hero enters a *liminal second stage* of "structural death" or "non-being".<sup>31</sup>

Characteristic of this middle stage are

- encounters with deities or superhuman powers ( Poseidon, Athena);
- loss of status or rank ("No-Name");
- reversal to an embryonic or new-born condition (father-child simile, naked on Scheria);
- encounters with monsters (Cyclops, Sirens, Skylla);
- gender confusion (reverse gender similes);
- death and birth experienced "in unity" (visit to Hades and return).

The liminal stage is dedicated to the acquisition of the traditions of the people, its myth, theogony and cosmogony, says Turner, and we have seen how Odysseus not only learns but experiences cosmic forces embodied in myth.

Knowledge acquisition in the liminal stage, Turner tells us, focuses on the communication of the *sacra*, a bizarre and complex set of items held in great secrecy and regard despite their mundane forms: a drum, a mirror, a fan, or pictures of the journey of the dead. These may embody "primordial constituents" relative to the making of the world, and the body, too, as a microcosmic model of the universe.<sup>32</sup> Whilst it is known that 'hidden tokens' such as these are typical of initiations into Greek Mystery religions, the anthropological record places them in much wider and universal contexts.

<sup>29</sup> Pilgrimage creates a liminal state: Turner (1974) pp. 166-197.

<sup>30</sup> Turner (1967) pp. 93-111.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 96.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. pp. 103, 107.

Although the liminal state is generally identified with biological transitions such as birth, puberty, and death, the identical process is enacted in a renewal of kingship or chiefdom designed to strengthen the individual whose well-being guarantees the health of the people.<sup>33</sup> Through ritual abasement at a significant point in the agricultural year, the king is eventually restored (via sacred marriage)<sup>34</sup> to be reunited with his people in the third and final stage of initiation, 'integration'.

The pattern of those Adventures described to Alkinoos and Arete by the hero will easily be recognised, and also the final reunion of Odysseus with Penelope and his reintegration into Ithakan society.

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<sup>33</sup> Turner (1967) p. 110.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 109.

### *Interpretations of the circular journey: Scholarship*

The *Apologoi* have prompted centuries of scholarly speculation and many attempts to devise from the text of the *Odyssey* a narrative schema which would explain in structural, geometric terms which of the episodes of the Adventures were the most prominent and meaningful; <sup>35</sup> this, it is hoped, would reveal ‘the sense’ of the most colourful and highly worked of the *Odyssey*’s six sections.

Four recent reconstructions of the hero’s journey as a cosmic voyage are those of Laurin Johnson (1999), Nanno Marinatos (2001), Dmitri Nakassis (2004) and Alain Ballabriga (1986 and 1998). The first three project a cosmic voyage for Odysseus which takes him on a circular journey through the heavens.

On this issue I would argue that there is no contradiction in the poetic mind between physical reality (terrestrial geography) and a metaphysical order derived from those geographical entities, if all relate to a single creation; I can imagine also that things heard of from others and things personally experienced could play comparable roles in the formation of an imaginary universe, with, or without, symbolic significance being accredited to any one location.

Although I find myself very much of a mind with Johnson, Marinatos and Nakassis on this issue of an extra- or supra-terrestrial journey, there are some important points of divergence. On the other hand, some remarkable agreements do arise between our four interpretations. My own, in formation since 2001, was arrived at independently of the three named writers, whose work was unfamiliar to me until 2005. To do justice to their achievement and to demonstrate how my own reading of the *Odyssey*’s symbolism both complements their own and diverges from it, I review their books and articles separately here, beginning with **Johnson’s**. <sup>36</sup>

Briefly, for **Laurin Johnson** Odysseus’ journey is a circular one which takes the

<sup>35</sup> Scholarship resumed by Most (1989) p. 16, notes 7, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Greek spellings follow individual writers’ usage.

hero through the twenty eight asterisms known from pre-Greek Vedic literature. By following the circle of the sun's ecliptic Odysseus would travel through these critical points, each of whose star configurations provides a mini-narrative which Johnson believes he has found in the episodes of books nine to twelve. The killing of a great stag in *Odyssey* book ten, for example, corresponds to the 'destruction' of the constellation of Orion as he disappears below the horizon.<sup>37</sup>

There is a mnemonic 'code' of astronomical lore at the heart of the *Odyssey*, he suggests.<sup>38</sup> This is a viable premise but unfortunately the treatment is too shallow to carry conviction. There are several inaccuracies and some admitted *lacunae* in the author's linkage of stars and episodes which compromise the whole argument.<sup>39</sup> The great age and obscurity of the *Vedas* makes this a particularly difficult enterprise. Nevertheless there are some observations here which deserve mention.

The "double journey of the sun" described in the *Vedas* divides into a northern passage (*devayana*) and a southern (*pitryana*): 'Two Paths'. They rise and fall as the sun (apparently) circles the earth, their high and low points those of the solstices. The first is the path of the gods, the second the path of man or the ancestors, and the paths are also those of the souls of the dead. We can recognise here a parallel to the two paths of Homer's Cave of the Nymphs. There has been much to say in these pages about the 'Two Paths' and one could probably re-examine the theme in the light of this astronomical lore.

Johnson's scheme for the hero's travels is set out in figure IV, 1. The rationale of the pairings Aeolia-Thrinacie, Lotus Eaters and Sirens, and others, generally make good sense, but the Lotus-Sirens alignment is compromised by the attribution, "gains knowledge of future"; for the hero *avoids* the song and knowledge of the Sirens (12, 173-176); nor does he eat of the lotus of forgetfulness (9, 82-104). The single plane of

<sup>37</sup> L. Johnson (1999) pp. 62-68.

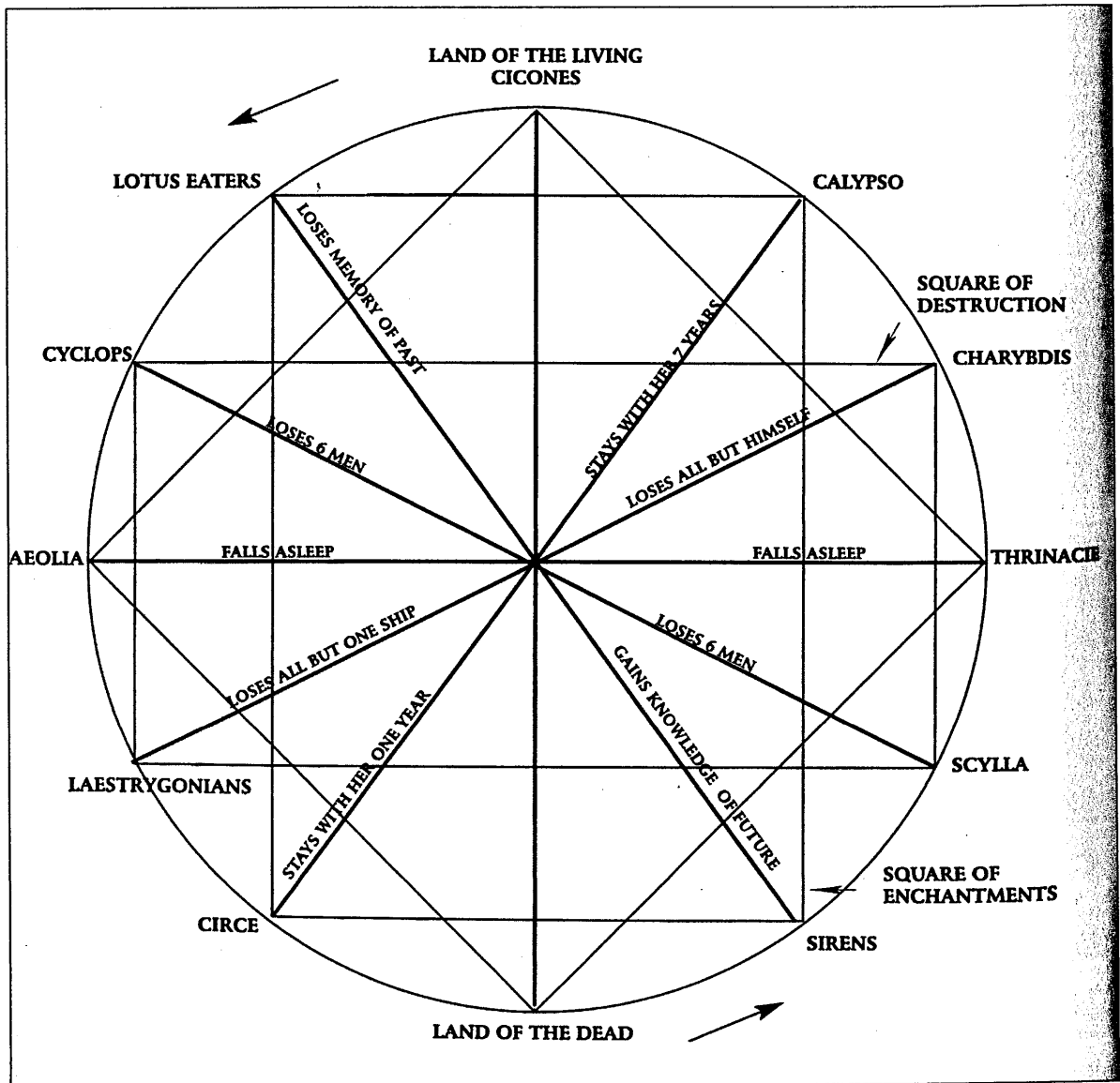
<sup>38</sup> Ibid. pp. 33, 35. Cf. Wood and Wood (1999).

<sup>39</sup> McMahon (2000) p. 1.

Johnson's diagram neglects the vertical dimension, which is unfortunate in view of his expertise in the geography of the night sky.

Fig. IV, 1.

L. Johnson (1999) p. 30. fig. 1.1.





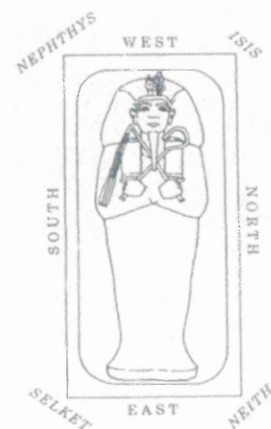
**Nanno Marinatos** reminds us that the circular cosmic journey was a current genre in Near East, Greece and Egypt in the Iron Age, when the sun's circumlocution through equal periods of Underworld darkness and heavenly daylight gave the model for the spiritual voyage of the deceased.<sup>40</sup> As early as the Middle Kingdom in Egypt (2040-1640) the solar transit was known as "the path of the two ways".<sup>41</sup> The 'soul journey' follows a path through the twelve gates of the night hours, each with their guardian and specific obstacles designed to test the traveller.<sup>42</sup>

In proposing a circular, cosmic journey for Odysseus through 'solar gates' of the Egyptian model, she finds further support in the earliest known 'map' from Babylonia showing seven islands around a central, hence cosmic, city (IV, 2). Indirectly or not, this provides the pattern for Odysseus' Adventures, it is said.

Regeneration of the sun (its new birth) takes place in the east, which Marinatos identifies with Circe, who is matched along the east-west axis of the horizon by Calypso in the west. Hence there are two hemispheres, upper and lower, having separate identities. The Egyptian parallel is taken further in this article by the recognition based on archaeological material that proves Isis and her sisters Nephtys, Neith and Selket can also represent cardinal points of the compass in the Egyptian pantheon. The result is a "bipolar" cosmos characterised by "constant tension".<sup>43</sup>

**Fig. IV, 2.**

**Anthropoid outer coffin and sarcophagus  
of Tutankhamun.  
Valley of the Kings, Thebes.  
18<sup>th</sup>. Dynasty (1550-1307).  
Wilkinson (1994) pp. 78f.**



<sup>40</sup> Marinatos (2001) pp. 381f., 387, 410f.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. p. 382, note 5. Cf. my Two Paths, III, pp. 63f. *passim*.

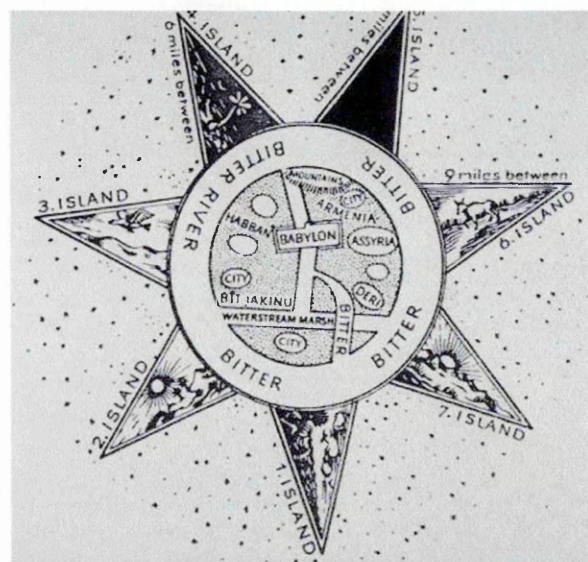
<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p. 387.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

So far, Marinatos' ideas correspond with my own, most especially in the matter of the solar path as a form of initiation. The Egyptian themes likewise correspond with the Indian sun lore, especially Sungates, discussed in these pages.<sup>44</sup> The clearly defined similarities between the *Odyssey* and eastern wisdom literature, and the mystical and moralistic tone she detects in the epic <sup>45</sup> lead Marinatos to propose an "Orphic Odysseus". <sup>46</sup> Her identification (like Johnson's) of Circe and Calypso as cardinal directions on this route is particularly encouraging.

**Fig. IV, 3.**

**Babylonian world map  
7<sup>th</sup>. - 6<sup>th</sup>. centuries.  
British Museum ANE 92687.  
Drawing, reconstruction  
Unger (1937) p. 2.**



Marinatos cites as an organising image the seventh century Babylonian World Map, <sup>47</sup> a 'cosmic' clay map and the earliest surviving plastic example of the

'idea of the centre'. But she overlooks some significant evidence. Her figure 6 (the tablet) is best supplemented by the reconstruction given above (IV, 3) which clearly shows the intention to place Babylon at the centre of 'island directions', making it a cosmic city. Since the discovery of a missing clay piece, it is generally now held that the damaged tablet held not seven (as here) but eight islands, by which the artefact now conforms to the symmetrical pattern of the four cardinal directions and the two solar paths and their solstices. <sup>48</sup>

An unfortunate omission is Marinatos' neglect of the cuneiform text

<sup>44</sup> III, pp. 51-57.

<sup>45</sup> Marinatos (2001) pp. 410f.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> Proposed as a copy of an older tablet, on the basis of its evidence of established traditions. Delano Smith (1996) p. 209.

<sup>48</sup> Finkel (1995) pp. 26f. Delano Smith (1996) p. 209.

accompanying the World Map, which seems to attribute specific characteristics to each of the eight 'directions'.<sup>49</sup> Some of the surviving seven are obscure, but others can be interpreted in the light of traditions relating to the *axis mundi*. (Although the author speaks of "axes" and polarity, she does not refer to the axis myth).

The reverse of the damaged tablet describes five of the islands or regions shown as triangles and linked to cardinal directions. 'Island 5' lies due north in complete darkness, "the sun not visible", a striking match to the Vedic north beyond the sun and the difficulty of Odysseus on Circe's island. 'Island 6' is "where a horned bull dwells", which may be seen as a match to Homer's island of Helios' cattle.

Using the Odyssean material and some Hesiodic references, the "cosmic junctures" of the upper and lower hemispheres (at the east and west) are identified by Marinatos with the homes of Circe and Calypso, and with meeting points of night and day in *Od.* 10, 86, and Parmenides' *Proem*.<sup>50</sup> On this basis, Marinatos arrives at a scheme reproduced here (IV, 4 overleaf).

The vertical dimension is identified in the rising and descending sun.<sup>51</sup> This is not however the same as full three-dimensionality, and here Marinatos and I part company. In seeing the island of Circe as a divided location, half in the upper, and half in the lower hemisphere, like the land of the Aethiopeans,<sup>52</sup> she satisfactorily deals with the narrative flow of Odysseus' journey to the Underworld and return to her island, but gives no adequate notion of *why* this descent and ascent are needed, nor the means (the *how*) by which it is effected.

<sup>49</sup> West, *East* p. 145. These "notes... are intriguingly reminiscent of remote places mentioned in the *Odyssey*".

<sup>50</sup> Marinatos (2001) pp. 396f.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p. 398.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. p. 399.

Fig. IV, 4.

Marinatos (2001)  
fig. 11, p. 397.

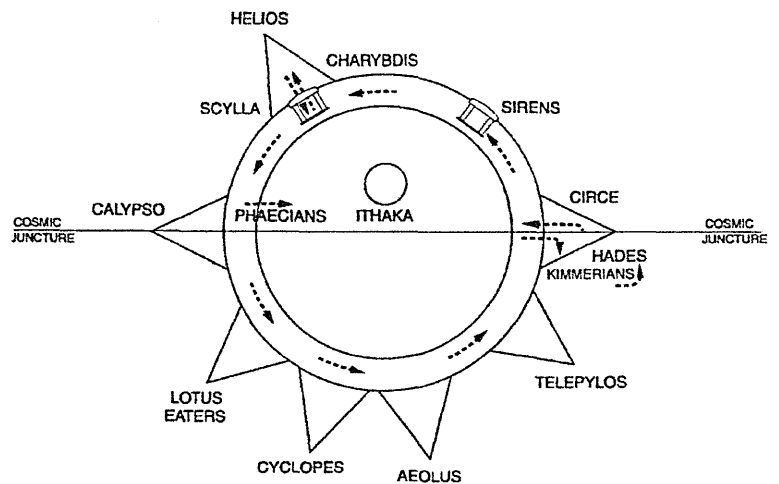
Seven 'islands' are introduced, as on the unreconstructed Babylonian map.

A more evenly distributed scheme, with higher mnemonic value, would have made sense in terms both of performance

and natural symmetry. The plan (IV, 4) is further unbalanced by the placement of the majority of 'islands' in the lower hemisphere. The arrows indicate that the journey is made anti-clockwise, as in Johnson's scheme, thus following the east - west course of the sun. In ritual the overwhelmingly attested tradition<sup>53</sup> is for a clockwise circumambulation to the auspicious right hand, which follows the path of the sun *as it touches the earth*. Hence I suspect that Marinatos' diagram is reversed, and her sequence both incorrect and confused in the subsequent alignments in all but the placement of Circe and Calypso.

The recognition of many points of symmetry and antithesis<sup>54</sup> matches my own interpretation and Johnson's, but these points are not described in detail in the author's overview of the episodes. The latter are treated, but not in terms which are reducible to clear antitheses.

The title of **Dmitri Nakassis'** 2004 article, 'Gemination at the Horizons' indicates his acceptance of the 'twinning' sisters Kirke and Kalypso as respective markers of the eastern and western points of the horizon. Proceeding from the mythical geography of



<sup>53</sup> Eliade, *Encyclopedia* vol. 3, pp. 509-511: Circumambulation.

<sup>54</sup> Marinatos (2001) p. 402.

the “edges of the earth”, *eschata gaies*, which he dissociates from the real geography in favour of an “idealist” view,<sup>55</sup> he rejects “the geographical guessing game played since antiquity”.<sup>56</sup> Nakassis analyses several instances of people and places “doubling at the horizon”.<sup>57</sup> The phenomena, which are cross-cultural, reflect alternative methods of describing sunrise and sunset, he claims.

His findings lead him to propose two “polar” models. In the uni-polar type, the sun rises and sets at the same location. In the bi-polar type the sun rises and sets at opposite ends of the horizon (E-W). As examples of the **uni-polar**, Nakassis cites Hesiod’s location of Atlas, upholding “broad heaven”<sup>58</sup> in *Theogony* lines 747-754, where Night and Day cross a single threshold, and the same god at Homer’s “navel of all the waters”, Kalypso’s island, which is also remotely located in the west.<sup>59</sup> Tartaros is for Nakassis (and here I agree), “a cosmic nexus that contains the sources and limits of the world”. (It corresponds to the figure described here as a ‘containing *omphalos*’, through which the axis passes to root itself into the underworld).

This uni-polar version is described by the writer as an *axis mundi*, and the given source references are the article by Nagler (1996) used in this study and the *Traité d’histoire de religions* (1949, 1974) of Mircea Eliade, supplemented by Frame (1978) on solar aspects of the *Odyssey*.

Uni-polar threshold and Tartaros-cave are thus proposed by Nakassis as located *both centrally and at the edge of the world*.<sup>60</sup>

In pursuit of his **bi-polar** prototype, the author delves into the problem of the divided Aethiopes (1, 22ff.), that is, some in the west, some in the east,<sup>61</sup> before

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<sup>55</sup> Nakassis (2004) p. 215, no 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 230f.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid. p. 216.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. pp. 216-219.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 219.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. p. 219.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. pp. 219-221.

moving on to the Kirke-Kalypso bi-polarity of mythological doublets.<sup>62</sup> The difficulties of orientation on Kirke's island he attributes, as I do, to its proximity to the house of the sun. Individually the two goddesses represent uni-polar *axes* of the world, but as a pair they constitute a bi-polar model through their connected narrative functions and their similar personal characteristics.<sup>63</sup> Further bi-polarities are identified in the mirroring of the Laistrygones and Kimmerians, the eastern Cattle of the Sun and the western Cattle of Geryon (in another tradition), and related episodes such as Gilgamesh at the mountains of Mashu and the collocation of solar and life cycles in Egypt and the Near East.<sup>64</sup>

This is the foundation on which Nakassis constructs his schema of a circular journey for Odysseus, taking in the "gates of the sun" at opposite ends of the earth's limits, which are "simultaneously at its cosmological centre".<sup>65</sup>

It is apparent that Nakassis has found very real difficulty in reconciling his two models into a coherent system.

The same problems were encountered by **Alain Ballabriga**, who tackles Homeric directionality with some references to the *axis mundi*. His immensely detailed two works<sup>66</sup> on the mythic world of the Greeks include evidence later than Homer and a selection of non-Homeric myths. This in turn is merged with geographical identifications of points on the journey, identified mainly in the western Mediterranean. The importance of summer and winter solstice directions, the four corners of the world, and 'gates of the sun' are however indicated for the placement of certain Odyssean Adventures.<sup>67</sup>

But he has particular difficulty with the many incidences of sudden "convergence"

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. pp. 221ff.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 223.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. pp. 224- 229,

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. p. 230.

<sup>66</sup> Ballabriga (1986, 1998).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid. (1986) p. 34: e.g. Nestor's Pylos as "*une porte de l'Occident*". Chap. 3: solstitial axes.

<sup>68</sup> at the eastern and western horizons on his mythic map, which is a “*carte-image*” (imaginary map) rather than an attempt at geographical accuracy. His explanation, that the margins of the world are distorted and chaotic, hence convergent, creates an impasse, particularly so in the case of Circe’s explicitly solar island <sup>69</sup> where Odysseus suddenly loses his way. Circe’s island is “sometimes western and sometimes eastern”.<sup>70</sup>

\*

I propose that the problem can be resolved in two ways, each of which could lead to a common solution.

Firstly, one could adopt the Indian concept of the moments of the sun’s rising and setting as indistinguishable, since there is only a split second, if that, between the moment when the sun turns through the seasonal solstice point or, alternatively, ascends to the horizon (out of the night) and appears above it to enter the phase of day.<sup>71</sup> These are the magical, liminal times, and the people in the land of the Aithiopes could be described as dwelling in identical but separate locations by this definition; Time, not geography, resolves the difficulty.

Secondly, it has emerged from the Sanskrit tradition of Pusan<sup>72</sup> that there can be two directions within a single path. Whether this path is imagined as a dual carriageway of parallel tracks, or a single path occupied alternately by an upward-travelling element or a downward, is probably unknowable and perhaps irrelevant to the argument.

If the *axis mundi* contains two contrary flows, and if it can be located anywhere, (but particularly at the eastern and western horizons as a support of the heavens, where it will be bisected by the daily transit of the sun) then we have a cosmic model for a connection between heaven and earth which meets both the uni-polar and bipolar patterns of Nakassis, and the “cosmic junctures” at the horizon described by Marinatos.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. (1986) p. 126, “*brusques passages*”.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. 10, 185-187, dusk and dawn witnessed. Ballabriga (1986) pp.126-132.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. (1986) p. 129.

<sup>71</sup> IV, 7f.

<sup>72</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 5-7.

### *A New Interpretation*

There is no lack of agreement that the first *Nekyia* acts as a fulcrum to the course of the Adventures, making it the turning point in a large-scale ring composition. Such is the opinion of, among others, Glenn Most,<sup>73</sup> who has devised a diagrammatic version of the episodes which highlights ten in particular from the total. He makes the interesting observation that the ten are enclosed within a ‘*cordon sanitaire*’ of two-day storms. He finds many delicate balances of meaning between the pairings thrown up by the structure of his diagram (IV, 5, p. 23).

Most is at a loss to explain the purpose of the architectural patterning into sets and pairs: it is “elusive”. He discerns a theme of sociable and unsociable eating and hospitality (which is a major, repeated theme in the *Odyssey* and reinforced here by the monstrous habits of the Cyclops and other hosts encountered by the travellers) but is not entirely convincing that this is the *sole* function of the structured *Apologoi*.<sup>74</sup>

The limitation of diagrams such as these is that they are based on narrative development and take a two-dimensional form by proceeding conventionally from top to bottom and left to right of the page. The human imagination and the human experience of the outer world is not so bound, for it can project its imaginings into three dimensions, four with the inclusion of time. Since the material of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* emerged largely from a pre-literate age, when stories were heard and imagined rather than read and written, I propose to borrow and adapt Most’s diagram (IV, 5, 6, 7, 8) to create a visual and three-dimensional version of the structure of the Adventures.

In the schema, written words stand in place of islands and countries. If we translate these named islands into semi-geographical form they will emerge with a more significant profile. Taking the two day storms as our starting point, and turning the diagram through ninety degrees so that the sea is now represented as a horizontal line

<sup>73</sup> Most (1989) pp. 25-30. Diagram p. 22.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. pp. 24ff.



(as we experience it), we now have a base line on which to place Odysseus' 'islands' as a series of paired mountains divided by two low islands, and centrally, by the penetration of the earth, the *omphalos*-Nekyia, door to the Underworld of Hades.

The resultant image is shown as figure IV, 6 overleaf.

Four of those locations are configured as mountainous: Goat Island,<sup>75</sup> paired with the Cyclopes' land; the "sheer citadel" of the divided Laistrygonian land, and two appearances of the twin rocks, Skylla and Charybdis. This scheme has the benefit of justifying the inclusion of Goat Island as a necessary 'twin', and the repetition of the Skylla / Charybdis episodes to complete the four placements of the 'Four Sungates' at the solstice positions.

Aiolia and Thrinakia are not mountainous. Other locations are either not specified or are classified as low-lying, or below the horizon level in the case of the pit dug by Odysseus in his visit to Hades. However Thrinakia is evidently a solar island sacred to Helios which could represent the east. In the proposed sequence, Aiolia falls into place as the western counterpart to Thrinakia. All of this suggests a circular pattern for this island series which turns upon the eight compass points of a flat plane of the earth combined with a central axis (IV, 7 and 8).

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<sup>75</sup> 9, 114: Cyclopes as regular denizens of "the peaks of the high mountains."

Fig. IV, 5.  
Adapted from Most (1989) p. 22.

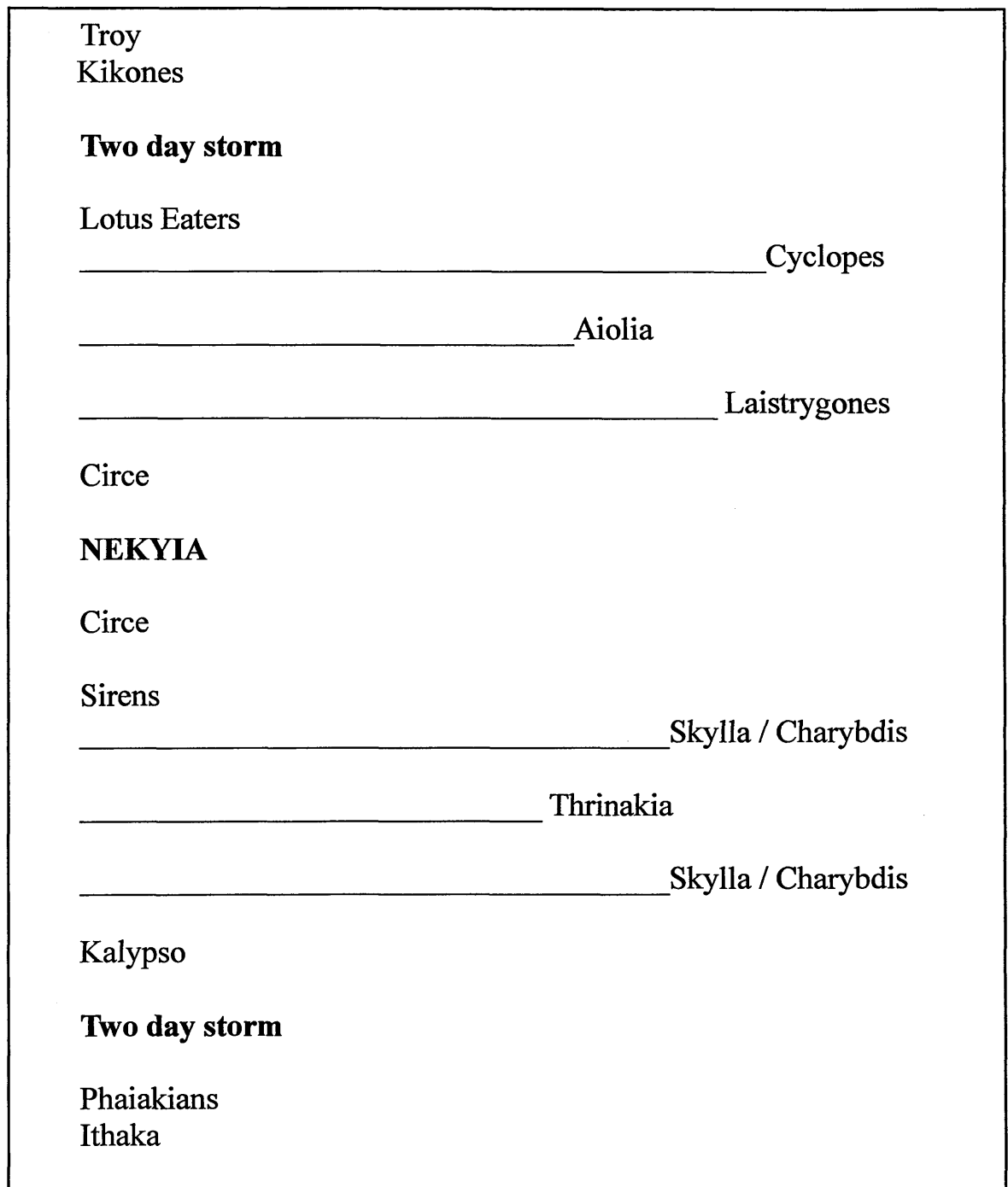
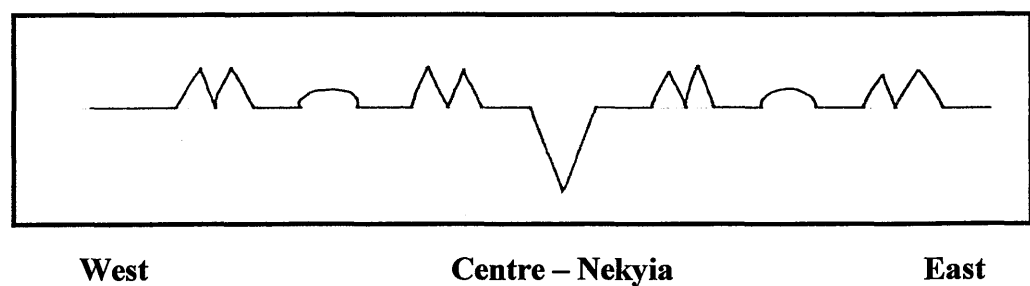


Fig. IV, 6.



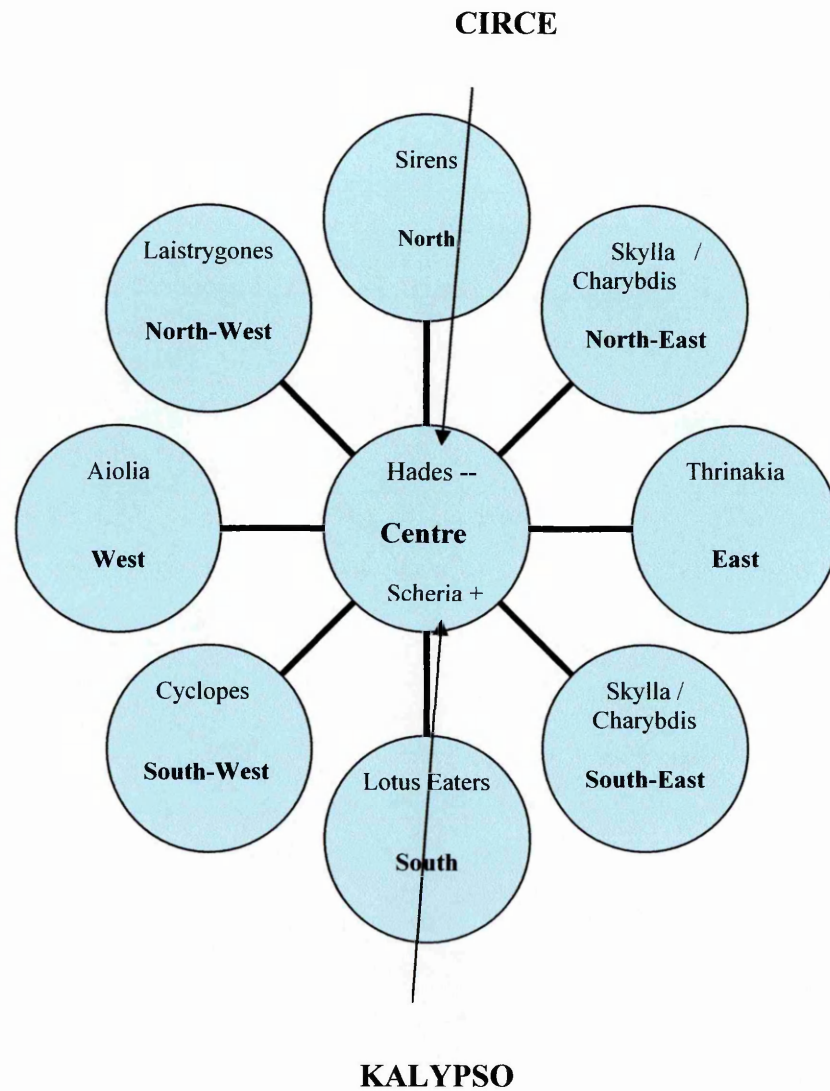


Fig. IV, 7.

**Clockwise journey through  
the islands of the *Apologoi*.**

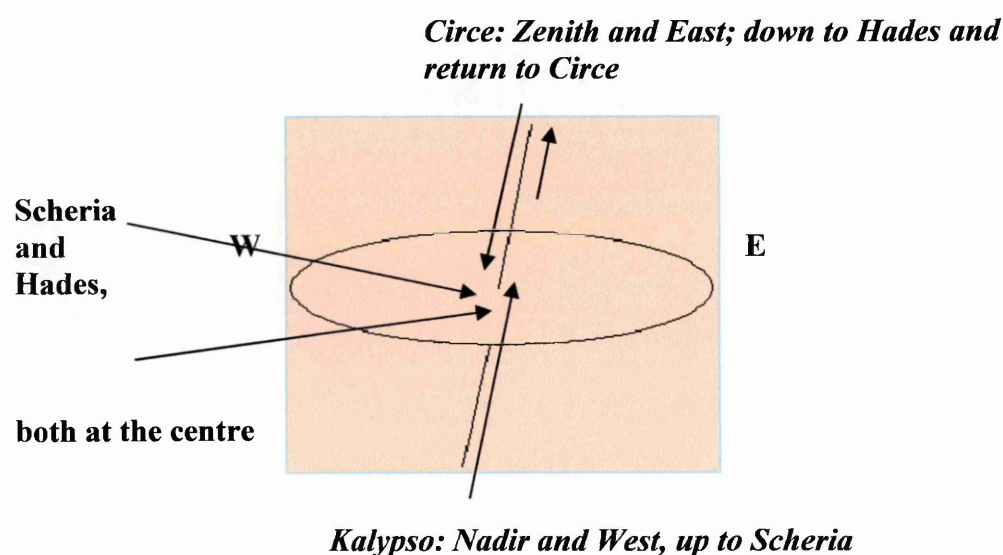
The western hemisphere of the diagram interprets the first path, that of separation (Lotus Eaters to Circe). After the visit to Circe and particularly, a central Hades, a second path through the eastern hemisphere (Sirens to Kalypso) carries the hero through further chaos towards subsequent reintegration (Return).

From the Laistrygones Odysseus travels via an axis 'up' to Circe's Aiaia; then 'down' to Hades, back 'up' to Circe, and onward to the Sirens. Thence he journeys to the disaster on Thrinakia, and, alone, travels 'down' the same or similar axis to

Kalypso's Ogygia. Once released, his craft bears him to central Scheria and his eventual return to Ithaka (IV, 8).

The voyage follows a clockwise, sunwise circumambulation of the islands which takes the travellers through the four directions or cardinal points, as well as the four interstitial directions which are at the same time the markers to the all-important solstice heights and depths. As we mean to read this diagram in three dimensions, the North-South *terrestrial* axis (connecting the Poles) must be supplemented with a *celestial* North-South axis relating to distant space. In consequence the diagram becomes that of a circular, horizontal plane (a flat earth), pierced by a vertical axis (IV, 8). The directions can now be read on two planes, with the celestial equivalents of the terrestrial directions represented, for example, by the Pole Star in the north of the skies rather than by the North Pole on the Arctic terrain. So Circe's kingdom can lie either in the terrestrial north, or in the skies above, or both, as the narrative requires. In fact her kingdom as we have seen probably extends vertically through the eastern skies from north to south, with the same pattern reflecting in the vertical western hemisphere with the kingdom of Kalypso.

Fig. IV, 8.



Circe's path from the zenith will lead to Hades, at the negative, 'death' centre of

the plane, whilst Kalypso's corresponding parallel path towards the centre will give access to the mirroring, *omphalos*-island of Scheria which perpetuates life.

Douglas Frame has an interesting observation.<sup>76</sup> When Odysseus and his men return "to life and light" from Hades, Circe's island has an eastern aspect (12, 1f.). When they were setting out however, they had to pass through an area of darkness, the Kimmerian land (11, 13-19). I submit that the change reflects routes occupying the separate paths of the axis, with the western ('down to darkness') running parallel to the eastern ('up to light'). A second arrow is placed on figure IV, 8 to indicate the return from Hades.

Ten adventures have been accommodated in sequence within the eight directions combined with the extra two of the north-south, zenith-nadir line. Excluded from the pattern are the departure from Troy- a start point- and the Kikonian land, in which Odysseus takes leave of the warrior class in which he is ever-triumphant, to enter a new phase of learning and becoming. His return to Ithaka, the end-point, takes him *via* Scheria, which must be allocated the crucial place at the cosmological centre, on the axis, at the place where the axis pierces the earth's plane. It must surely lie on the omphaloid point of the 'white' or 'divine' axis which corresponds to the place on the 'black' axis (second of the Two Paths) where un-regenerate souls moulder in the underworld of Hades. Homer's ideal world, the paradisaal isle of the Phaiakians, is a fitting counterpart to the dark world experienced in the first *Nekyia*, which has already been allocated a central position.

In this manner we have arrived at a design which creates a circle of completeness, containing the darker world of Circe and the *Nekyia*, which represents the separation phase of the initiate's journey, as well as the bright world of Kalypso and Scheria which betoken integration and return.

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<sup>76</sup> Frame (1978) pp. 48-50.

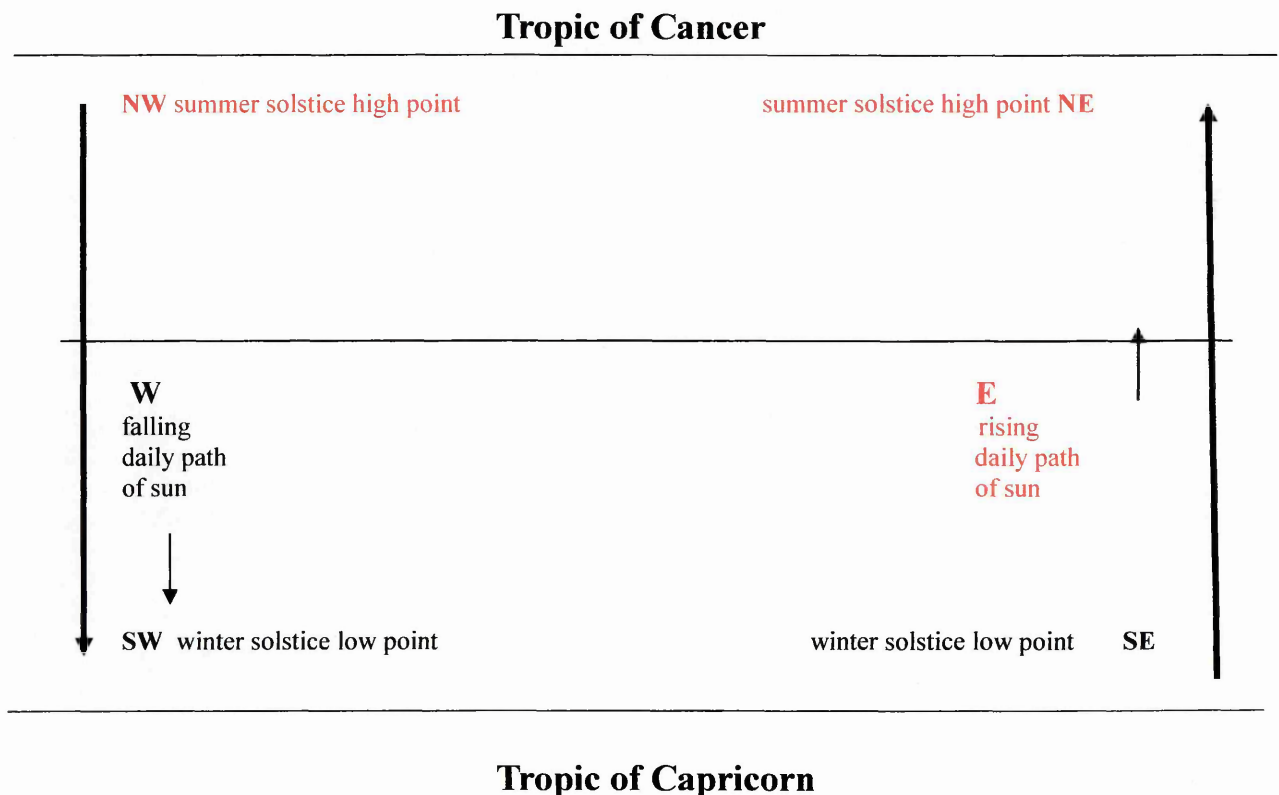
## *The Adventures in their cardinal locations*

### *North, South, East and West*

Setting aside for the moment the vertical dimension, the journey is to be described from the south and follows a clockwise circumambulation through the four terrestrial directions of the four cardinal points N, S, E, W, and their four interstices, NW, SW, NE, SE. A highly simplified version of the E-W line of the horizon and the crucial points of cardinal direction and solstice is given below (IV, 9). The sun's apparent movement through the skies encloses the globe in a 'Frame of Time'.

Fig IV, 9.

### **Tropics (solstice points) and the Two Paths of the Sun**



Some characteristics which determine narrative location are summarised as follows:

***South: Lotus Eaters (9, 82-104)***

- “Hostile winds” mark this as unfavourable territory (82f.).
- Memory, thus mind and *nous*, are negated.<sup>77</sup> In their ‘forgetfulness’, the Lotophagoi contrast to the Sirens (North) who know and remember. Odysseus refuses both the lotus drug (9, 87f.) and avoids the temptations of Memory (12, 181-196).
- Vegetarian in habit, the Lotophagoi are distinguished by diet from the monstrous cannibals in following western, northern and eastern episodes.
- As Egypt (associated with the lotus) lies south of the Greek world, mythic and physical geography concur in reality.
- Some ‘negative’ personifications, Night, Sleep and Death, dwell in the depths of Hades / Tartaros in *Theogony* 754-759, which I believe is on a *celestial south point* of the axis.

***South - West: Cyclopes (9, 105-566)***

- This is the point both of the Sun’s daily ‘death’ below the horizon, and entry into winter solstice.
- Paired islands create a SW cosmic gate equivalent to those of the NW, NE, and SE.
- The ‘gate’ is a place of death: the boulder missiles match those thrown by the Laistrygones in the NW. The cave is closed by a sized boulder of cosmic proportions which effectively denies access to the spiritual realm.
- The monster begins to isolate the hero by eating his companions.
- Odysseus escapes from a world of the dead (10, 466f.). The hero is nameless there (‘Outis’) and is reborn when he takes up his identity again (504f.; cf.

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<sup>77</sup> Frame (1978) p. 35ff.

Alkinoos' speech, 8, 552f.).<sup>78</sup>

- Cyclops as the one-eyed sun, blinded, is an apt rendering of the solar setting in the south-west and entry into winter.

***West: Aiolia (10, 1-76)***

- This would be the sunset island of the western horizon. It has solar aspects: "rampart of bronze" (10, 3-5), six sons, six daughters = two seasons? (10, 6).
- It is nearest to Ithaka (10, 28ff.).
- "Floating" (3) may signify 'sinking below the horizon.' Delos, birthplace of Apollo, was a wandering island until the god's birth. It was fixed by four columns (pillars of the sky?) by the arrival of pregnant Leto.<sup>79</sup>
- Hindu Varuna is the god of the *west*, partner to Mitra of the *east*, also the *nocturnal* god of winds, oceans and binding cords and agent of physical and cosmic death.<sup>80</sup> Aiolus has similar features, including the god's fickle temper<sup>81</sup> (10, 72 -75; cf. *RV* I. XXV, 2: "thy fierce anger when displeased").
- The bag of winds initially held and *neutralised* all four winds as directions (10, 20f. "all the blowing / winds") thus creating a still point within an *omphalos*-container. Movement follows the release of the West Wind (25f.), and maritime 'windy chaos' ensues when the remaining homologisation is broken, "the winds all burst out" (46-49).

***North - West: Laistrygonia (10, 80-131)***

- This is conceivably the high summer solstice point and the moment of diurnal descent into western sunset (10, 86).

<sup>78</sup> Frame (1978) pp. 64f.

<sup>79</sup> First reference: Pindar (Fr. 33d SM). Gantz (1993) pp. 38, 40.

<sup>80</sup> Eliade, *Images* pp. 95-99.

<sup>81</sup> Eliade, *Two* pp. 92f.



- *Telepylos* (82), 'Far Gate' confirms this as a solar portal. It is 'closed' by the unfriendly inhabitants.
- The Laestrygonians are related to the Cyclopes by their cannibalism, rock throwing, and cave-like harbour. The parallelism creates a westerly pairing reflected in the two easterly (NE and SE) appearances of the *Skylla-Charybdis* duo.

***North: Sirens (12, 39-54; 165-200)***

- The north is the place of power in the shamanic scheme.<sup>82</sup>
- A 'stilling of the winds' occurs on approach (12, 168-72).<sup>83</sup> This motif recurs at the island of the Phaiakians (5, 382-387) and on departure from Hades (11, 639f.). As at Aiolia, the homologisation of the winds commanded by a god (12, 168ff.) creates a beneficent Centre, and the men pass safely by.
- The Sirens are agents of death (12, 39-44). Only an escape towards the south, on the downward path to the Centre, can save Odysseus.
- The Sirens have access to all knowledge on earth (12, 191).
- Their southern counterparts, the Lotophagoi, represent forgetfulness which is the antithesis of knowledge.

***North-East: Skylla / Charybdis (12, 73-110; 234-259)***

- *Skylla* (= up, to an *omphalos*-cave of death) with *Charybdis* and its whirlpool (=down, to *omphalos*-whirlpool of regeneration, additionally marked by "a great fig tree", on land, 12, 103 and 432f.) together create a cosmic portal (at the dawn height of the summer solstice). The high and the low of *Skylla / Charybdis* represent the opposing directions up / down, on the vertical plane (= Two Paths).

<sup>82</sup> Eliade, *Shamanism* p. 279. Appendix 2, pp. 1-4.

<sup>83</sup> Ballabriga (1998) p. 168, notes.

- Their reappearance (**south-east**, 12, 426-446) marks the corresponding portal of the rising path of the winter solstice.

***East: Thrinakia (12, 260-402)***

- Overtly solar, this is the home of the cattle of Hyperion / Helios the Sun god.<sup>84</sup>
- Its sea cave of nymphs (12, 317f.) evokes the cave of westerly Ithaka.
- Odysseus sleeps (12, 338), as he did in sight of Ithaka (10, 31f.).

***South-East: Skylla / Charybdis (12, 426-446)***

- There is no narrative reason for the repetition, which suggests a structural imperative.
- This must be the Sungate of the rising solar path, the winter solstice point of the earth's reawakening.
- Here Odysseus begins his own rebirth, via the fig, Tree of Life.

***Zenith-nadir: Axis Mundi (various)***

- Circe guides Odysseus downwards to Hades with a following wind (11, 7f.), but later he returns to her land (12, 1ff.): a pattern of 'death' and 'resurrection'.
- Circe 'is' East and *celestial* North (12, 1-4, *East*: Dawn and Helios; above the horizon, 12, 4, the sun's "uprising"). The sun cannot be detected there (10, 190-193).<sup>85</sup>
- Kalypso 'is' West and *celestial* South (5, 276f. Kalypso instructs Odysseus to keep the Bear on his left; the 'navel of the earth', 1, 50, leads below the horizon).
- Between them the goddesses control two vertical hemispheres. Kalypso

<sup>84</sup> Frame (1978) pp. 44f., note 15, 45-47 : intelligence linked to cattle and sunrise in Vedic tradition.

<sup>85</sup> Ballabriga (1998) p. 142, at this point, the island is located in the "*Grand Nord*", where Night and Day meet.

returns the hero to the transformative Centre, Scheria.

- The respective paths relate to the cosmic axes or junctures with the horizon at the edge of the world.<sup>86</sup>
- Four handmaidens in the house of Circe (10, 348-351) and four rivers from Kalypso's cave (5, 70ff.) confirm and link their locations as *omphalos*-Centres at the meeting point of four directions, via the same homologisation as before (cf. the four winds).
- The Kimmerians' land (11, 14-19) lies, probably on the axial line, between Circe's island and Hades, perhaps on or beyond the River Ocean (11, 13). No light from Helios is seen there: permanent night reigns.<sup>87</sup>

### ***The Journey to the Centre: The Four Winds***

It is on Odysseus' eventual release from Kalypso that he is free to move towards that unique and isolated Centre where true spiritual immortality awaits him, where Alkinoos and his people "live far apart by [themselves] in the wash of the great sea / *at the utter end, nor do any other people mix with [them]*" (6, 204f., my italics).

But first he has to contend with winds of greater violence than he has ever known: "all the stormblasts / of all the winds together" (5, 292f.).

"East Wind and South Wind clashed together, and the bitter blown West Wind and the North Wind born in the bright air rolled up a heavy sea" (295f.).

These are winds which represent the forces of chaos, bearing "this way and that", *entha kai entha*.<sup>88</sup> Later, the raft is spun in a circle (*spiralling*- i.e. turning like the axis) as it

<sup>86</sup> Marinatos (1995) on the liminal character of Circe and her (transitional) location at the edge of the world and close to Hades: p. 133. She proposes an origin for Circe among Oriental cultic goddesses of death and regeneration, pp. 134-139.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *Theogony* 758-761; 274f.

<sup>88</sup> Like the winds of bottomless Tartarus: *Theogony* 745f.: "Gust after savage gust would carry him / Now here, now there", "*entha kai entha*". The phrase is also used to describe the less skilled charioteer's negotiation of the turning post (*Il.* 23, 320), also a likely axis. Coomaraswamy, *Gawain* p. 111, note 3: 'here' and 'there' are used in both Sanskrit and in Greek to indicate life ('be here') and death ('go there').

nears Charybdis (5, 314), this time like thistledown, and the winds now range in linear fashion to meet each other head on:

“and now it would be South Wind and North that pushed her between them, and then again East Wind and West would burst in and follow” (5, 331-2).

These directional winds are a critical marker of the World Centre, I believe.<sup>89</sup>

Other epic narratives maintain the ‘centre of the winds’ motif in similar contexts (references to the supernal), and in similarly ecstatic tones.<sup>90</sup> The winds appear to be early markers of the four directions,<sup>91</sup> but whether they be one or the other, they translate the evident impossibility of defining the point where (and when) a wind in headlong conflict with another ceases to be east and becomes west, or north becomes south.<sup>92</sup> Like the moment of sunrise, it is unknowable and unplaceable, hence magical.

Odysseus is now to break free from the whirling spiral of his path, pass through the spinning winds, and so penetrate to the mystical Centre which transcends the purely geographical central point.

The hero puts his trust in the raft built on Kalypso’s island and delays his parting from it. It has carried him since he left Kalypso’s island, sailing *east* (5, 277), therefore under the guidance of the Polar Star. Struck by a great wave, and losing half his “mast tree” (317), he rides the remaining timber “astride one beam, like a man riding on horseback” (371). Athene stills the stormwinds and gives him a North wind to carry him towards Scheria, where “windless weather” greets him (391f.).

<sup>89</sup> They are met buffeting against each other during the creation of the Sampo (mystic pillar) in the Finnish *Kalevala*: “the east puffed and puffed the west / and the south puffed more / and the north blasted”. Trans. Bosley, p. 116. Bk. 10, 341-345.

<sup>90</sup> In the poetry of a Sufi mystic, “a sound...from neither right nor left, from neither behind nor in front...from neither East nor West...” Diviani Shamsi Tabriz, quoted by Friedlander (1975) p. 21. *Book of Enoch*, trans. Nickelsberg (2004): pp. 38f.: Enoch’s vision, while circumambulating the four quarters: chap. 18. v. 2: “I saw the Four winds bearing the earth and the firmament of heaven”; v. 3: “they are the pillars of heaven”.

<sup>91</sup> *C&G.*, wind: pp. 1110-1. Winds are frequently the ‘breath’ of God. In the Omaha initiation rite quoted by Jane Harrison (1912) pp. 66-71, the initiand is sent “into the midst of the winds”.

<sup>92</sup> Alkinoos implies that he dwells where east meets west: Odysseus arrives as a “suppliant here... from the eastern or western people” (8, 29).

*The Hero Reborn*

Odysseus struggles to find a safe landfall on the coast but is buffeted back and forth on the jagged teeth of the shoreline. From the height of a wave he views the welcome sight of land and forest (5, 394-399) in a reverse-age simile which makes the hero 'a child' in respect of the 'father finding new life' which is what the land represents to him. This is a hint here not only of the timeless or liminal point which makes an irrelevance of human years, but also of the imminent spiritual rebirth of the hero on the isle of the Phaiakians.<sup>93</sup> It is at a spiritual Centre that man concludes his initiatic voyage, and like all previous moments of transition it is marked as another island in the course of Odysseus' journey.

The Centre receives additional animal markers here in the forms first of the implied snake (5, 426) and secondly the octopus (5, 432-435). When Odysseus comes near to having the skin torn from his body, we 'read' intertextually that he is to be regenerated just as the snake sheds a skin and lives on, renewed. As for the octopus, its eight legs may be tokens of the meeting point of eight directions, and a further reference to the central boss on "the shield lying on the misty face of the water" (5, 281).

Odysseus' emergence from the waters clad only in the veil of Ino constitutes a further birth image. Once ashore he casts it aside as instructed (5, 459) and walks naked ('as a newborn') into the kingdom of the Phaiakians. He chooses to disrobe in the mouth of the "seaward course of the river" (460). This was a "sweet running river" (442) and it is there that he seeks guidance from the river god (444-53) who "stayed his current...and made all quiet in front of him" (451-2). Here we have one of the gods' pathways, a sacred river similar to those found in all paradise literatures, which leads the traveller to the sacred tree and the waters of life, that revivify and transform the soul.

<sup>94</sup> The tree that we anticipate in this standard setting is in the wood, "close to the water /

<sup>93</sup> Newton (1984). Holtsmark (1966) pp. 206-210.

<sup>94</sup> C&G. p. 1081: water: universally a symbol of life, cleansing, regeneration; p. 808, river: "The stream

in a conspicuous place" (475f.). The gods- or the structuring poet- appear to be marking the hero's path towards the Centre.

### *A 'Firegate' to match the Cosmic Sungates*

Odysseus finds the episode's most powerful marker of a place of transition, the paired olive bushes "that grew from the same place" (5, 477). It is now possible to explain why the two are differentiated as usually translated: one uncultivated, wild, and the other, a cultivated variety.<sup>95</sup> Like the twins of the solstices, or the two pillars, or the conjoined snakes of the caduceus, they are of the same species or form, but essentially the *opposed* halves of a unity.<sup>96</sup> Together they constitute a solar gate, through which the hero *redivivus* is to pass in his transition towards a higher spiritual state. The poet emphasises the impenetrability of the two olives in such a way that they are virtually fused into that unity, "so close together / were they grown, interlacing each other" (480f.). An important feature of this shelter is that it gives total cover from the weather's excesses: neither wind nor rain nor sun could trouble him there, in which characteristic this humble shelter resembles not only the 'mystic unreality' (timeless, unchanging) of Olympus and the Elysian Field (4, 561-568), where wind, rain and snow are unknown, but also the prolific gardens of Kalypso and Alkinoos, and the Libyan land visited by Menelaos (4, 85-89).

This is where Odysseus makes his bed in a deep layer of leaves<sup>97</sup> and falls into instantaneous sleep, a sleep<sup>98</sup> of such depth that has not been heard of since his unfortunate removal from the waking world on the approach to Ithaka from the isle of

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is that of life and death", another form of the *axis mundi*. Swimming against the stream = return to the divine source.

<sup>95</sup> Pausanias 8. 37, 10: in a sacred grove at Lycosura, an olive tree and an evergreen oak grew from the same root.

<sup>96</sup> Fontana (2003) p. 171. "Two Trees, One Root...duality emerging from unity, and also the fundamental oneness that underlies all life". Cf. the vision of Zechariah 4, 2f., flanked by two olive trees.

<sup>97</sup> The olive is not deciduous; symbolism is taking precedence over reality. Plutarch, *Quaestiones Conviviales* 723F: the olive keeps its leaves.

<sup>98</sup> Sleep is a form of trance in which the soul can voyage outside the body, like a shaman. I. Kings 18, 27. On trance, sleep and death in Greek tradition, Vermeule (1979) chap. 5.

Aiolus (10, 30f.), and on the island of Helios the sun king (12, 338). These two locations, we have suggested, are respectively the west and east and accordingly the places of the setting and rising sun; in the episode of the landing on Scheria we are witnessing the same phenomenon of sleep, and will hear of it again when the hero is transported from the island of the celestial Centre on the Phaiakians' magical ship. In the first two instances Odysseus was granted opportunities to pass through the Sungates into the Otherworld, but, we must assume, was not far enough engaged in his initiatic journey to do so. Here at the *solar* World Centre that process is to be finalised.

Book 5 concludes with a well-developed simile in which the hero is compared to a seed of fire, *sperma pyros* (490). Whereas the 'seed' is part of the biological imagery of rebirth which dominates the hero's 'emergence from the waters', the 'fire' draws the olive tree portal into the wider range of gateway symbolism. 'The fire between the pillars' was manifest in the episodes of clashing rocks and the territories of Skylla, Charybdis and the Sirens; fire or smoke marked the habitations of Circe and Kalypso, which were the navel points of the axis; and Odysseus sharpened his 'axial' stake in the fire of the Cyclops' cave. What is more, fire is the equivalent of light, revelation, and the presence of the divinity; fire is also the agent, like water, of the ritual of purification and renewal.<sup>99</sup>

Thus it is that Odysseus can bury himself like a log in the ashes (488), later arising refreshed and 'reborn' for his ritual 'baptism' in the river. He is now at the true Centre of Life, the counterpart of the dreadful Centre of Death encountered during the Nekyia. The two paths of the life-spiral have been met, conquered and absorbed; Odysseus has completed the soul-journey into immortality.

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<sup>99</sup> C&G., fire: p. 379-382. *H. Hymn to Demeter*, 239-244: baby Demophoon was to be "buried... in the heart of the fire, / like a torch", to make him "ageless, deathless".

*The Celestial City*

The power, the blessings and authority conferred by proximity to the axis, which determines sacred space, are universally converted into architectural terms. It may be as little as a containing wall for a sacred tree, or as great as a city embracing at its heart a palace-temple where the ruler commands from his throne room.

Reflections on the ideal city as part and parcel of a social utopia are commonly associated with the Platonist writers of the Hellenistic age. It appears however that there is an older proto-mythic genre of physical and social perfection in far-off imaginary lands, difficult of access, where the inhabitants lead exceptionally long and privileged lives, free of sickness and enjoying fruits out of season, as Homer has described them in 'Syria', Scheria and on Olympos. Death in these lands can be a gentle process of rebirth.

Himself favoured by the gods and viewed as one by Nausikaa (6, 243), Odysseus finds himself in the company of a maiden who reminds him of a *supernatural* palm tree seen by the altar of Apollo (6, 162f.) and "such a tree had never yet sprung from the earth" (167).<sup>100</sup> By this evocation of a potentially cosmic tree, Homer may be reminding us that this is a cosmic city, and indeed it was built on cosmic principles with the prior construction of the circular wall (6, 9-10).<sup>101</sup>

Athene's departure from the chamber of Nausikaa to the bright slopes of Olympos (6, 41-6) invites a comparison between the two establishments, which indeed is justified given the costly appointments (7, 84f.), which reflect the glorious light of sun and moon.<sup>102</sup> Not only are the doors, threshold and lintel forged of precious metals, they are flanked by a set of silver pillars on the threshold, and guardian dogs of divine workmanship. This is a far-from-common doorway which in its brilliance must evoke

<sup>100</sup> Nausikaa is another pillar-goddess; at 8, 457f. she stands beside "the pillar, that supported the roof with its joinery", like Penelope.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Roman determination of the *mundus*. Allcroft (1927) pp. 321ff. Rykwert (1999) p. 202.

<sup>102</sup> As does the house of Menelaos (4, 43-46) which Telemachos compares with the court of Zeus on Olympos (4, 72-75).



an image of the cosmic doorway that lies on the horizon or in the 'eye of the sun'. The paired pillars and dogs are repeated in the thrones "backed against the wall on both sides" (95) leading from the door inwards, and "the young men fashioned all of gold and in their hands holding / flaring torches" (100f.) are no other than anthropomorphic forms of the two shining pillars (if we may assume them to be paired). This is truly a fiery gateway and processional avenue into the darker centre of the house by night (102).

### *Timelessness and Silence*

Through Odysseus' eyes we experience the unearthly perfection of the orchard of Alkinoos (7, 112-132): a great one, possibly four-square (113), fenced around, well-ordered (127), and above all *timeless*.<sup>103</sup> For in that place the fruit is constantly ripening in uninterrupted productivity, betokening extreme fertility and absence of corruption, but above all revealing a suspension or absence of the seasons. Just as on the approach to the island the winds were neutralised, here cyclic time is caught in a similar vacuum, "lush through the seasons" (128).

This timelessness has implications for the conduct of affairs in the palace. Although events unroll in temporal succession, with the entry and reception of Odysseus and the narration of his adventures up to the day of his release, we have the curious moment of his irruption into the presence of Alkinoos and Arete when there is a single, frozen suspension of customary responses, and "all fell silent through the house" (7, 144). This and the reluctance of the queen to speak until some time later, we know as the 'silence of Arete' but it is equally the silence of Alkinoos until an aged courtier breaks the spell.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Utnapishtim, who "found life eternal", *Gilgamesh* IX. 76, trans. George, p. 72, gives to Gilgamesh a magic robe which remains white and stainless, hence 'timeless' until he regains his city. Ibid. XI. 270. p. 98.

Silence is at several points associated with kingship in the Homeric canon.<sup>104</sup>

Odysseus himself requires the 'man of righteousness' to take *in silence* the gifts of the gods (18,140f.) and the sceptre-bearing king at the centre of the great ring composition of the *Iliad*'s Shield of Achilleus<sup>105</sup> equally watches his harvesters in silence. In narrative terms a certain frozen moment of surprise at the Phaiakian court is understandable, given the new arrival's sudden and dishevelled entrance to the megaron; it does not however adequately explain the long delay by Arete in giving that favourable reception promised by Nausikaa. In the context here proposed, that Odysseus has arrived at a timeless Centre, a zero point which is both infinity and nothingness, the moment of silence would be the poet's only means of marking the timeless point of his hero's arrival, namely by suspending speech and action, whose dependence upon progression is a factor of time. The moment could not be stated, but it could be marked in a manner perceptible to those who could read the inner text.

<sup>104</sup> Silence is proper to the gods (19, 42f.) Penelope's prolonged silence during the recognition scene is a doublet of 'silent' Arete in her reticence (23, 93, 106).

<sup>105</sup> *Il.* 18, 554-557. Stanley (1993) p.10.

*The Return to Ithaka*

Two similes establish that the Phaiakian ship does not sail, but flies, first like the chariot of the sun drawn by four stallions and secondly like a bird of prey- the one who customarily tops the polar axis and serves as messenger of the gods. Emphasis is on the ease of movement, the hawk that flies “lightest of winged creatures” and the chariot that cuts an effortless way, drawn by the horses that barely touch their “path” across the sea (13, 81-88). All is harmony and unison, from the horses who “all break together”, to the ship’s course that never wavers. The lifting of the stern would seem to release her from the drag of the waves, in contrast to the hero’s “hard crossing of big waters” (91).

Odysseus has followed ‘the path of the sun’ throughout his travels, and attempted on several occasions to gain access to a higher state of being by crossing the threshold of the sun at what we have described as solstitial and equinoctial points.

The Phaiakian ship is a spiritual vehicle of shamanic character, and its voyage magical. Since it returns Odysseus to Ithaka at dawn at the moment when the day star is shining (13, 93-5), we know this to have been a night journey, steered perhaps by the Pole Star, but his moment of landing at dawn is ‘out of time’ since neither night nor day is dominant.

Just as Odysseus reached Scheria through conflicting stormwinds, the Phaiakian ship cuts through hard winds buffeting outside the enclosing promontories of the bay of Phorkys, and the king returns to his own longed-for Centre, landing near the axial tree (102f.) welcomed by the axial goddess (221-440) and allowed to enter the omphaloid cave (13, 362ff.). A remarkable feature of this moment is that both mortal hero and immortal goddess appear to enter the cave *by the same doorway*,<sup>106</sup> which should not be possible...unless, of course, Odysseus has truly achieved immortal stature.

<sup>106</sup> 13, 366-371, esp. 370, “stowed it well away inside”.

*The closing of the axis-omphalos*

The returning Phaiakian sailors are not so fortunate as their passenger, for Poseidon's wrath is aroused and he threatens to hide their city under a mountain (13, 149-152). The mountain is a crushing *capstone* of gigantic proportions which would destroy the settlement; however Poseidon is persuaded to lighten the sentence, and turns the ship to a rock in the sea. A ship-like rock in the sea is a lesser capstone that will close off the lower half of the axis below the waters, particularly when "rooted... there to the bottom" (163), and effectively curtailing the Phaiakians' power. The acceptance by King Alkinoos of the prophecy's fulfilment (179-81) implies that an old order has come to an end and a new begun. These momentous events underline the magnitude of the hero's rare achievement in passing through the Sungate of the Gods.

*At the Navel of Ithaka*

At home at last, in his disguise as a wretched beggar, the hero's major preoccupation (so he tells the suitors), is with his "wretched belly, / that cursed thing" (17, 473f.). The stomach centres the human body, as does the *omphalos*-navel, so the hidden sense of this unheroic preoccupation with an empty interior space may be a punning allusion to the hero's return to his place of birth and rebirth, his own centre of being. We should perhaps also view references to the presence of Odysseus in the belly of the Wooden Horse, in 'the belly' of the city of Troy (8, 499-513) as another instance of a thematic allusion.

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A last consideration: if it was not a haphazard journey, was the hero's lengthy circumambulation in any sense necessary or purposeful in any other than a personal sense? A place could be found for Odysseus among the many kings as "dying gods" who ritually renewed their kingship through voluntary abasement, and revitalised their

lands in the New Year festivals.<sup>107</sup> The association of the hero with so many forms of the cosmic intersection between heaven and earth reinforces the notion that Odysseus in his wanderings and trials renewed the heavenly bond for the sake of his people. In the words of Theodore Gaster, a leader conducting seasonal rites of renewal would be the “vessel and steward of topocosmic vitality”, in which function “he *is* the god in his present, as distinct from his durative, aspect”, and his divinity, “innate”.<sup>108</sup>

Odysseus begins his return to Ithaka at the winter solstice and is reunited with Penelope in time for the New Year festival of Apollo.<sup>109</sup>

### ***Footnote***

It has been argued that a narrative adventure was projected on to physical islands representing stages in a personal, initiatory or regal progress, not only reiterating but experiencing the solar pattern. The lesser motifs and themes examined in section III now find their proper place in a structured model.

Similar cosmic preoccupations in Aegean Bronze Age art and architecture will now be investigated for their possible correspondence with the Homeric cosmology.

<sup>107</sup> Gaster (1950) pp. 32f., § 38, 39, abasement rituals. Morgenstern (1960) *passim*.

<sup>108</sup> Gaster, *ibid.* pp. 32, 33.

<sup>109</sup> 20, 276-280; 21, 258f., 267f., 338, 364f.

## Section Five:

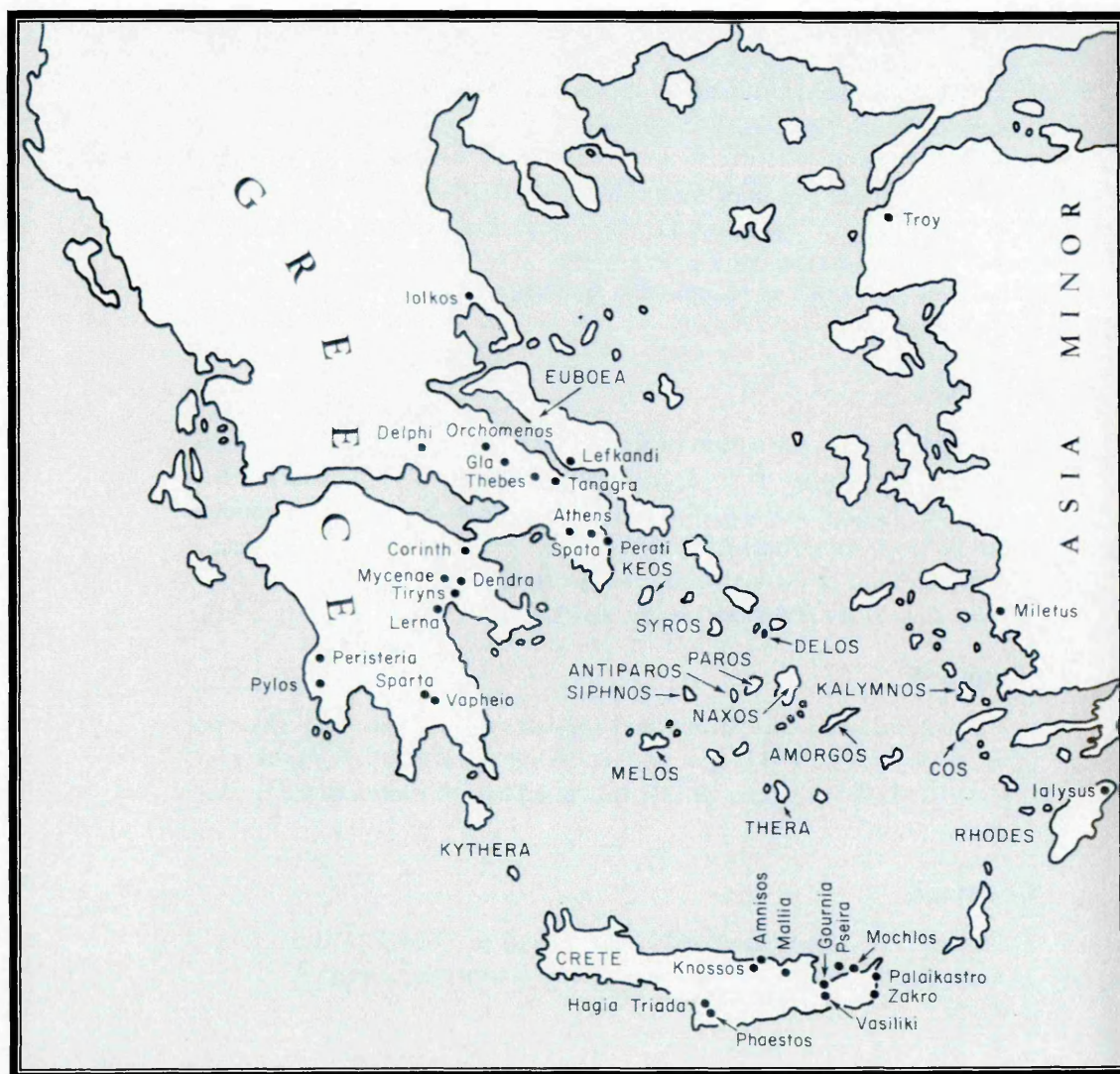
***The 'Idea of the Centre' in Minoan and Mycenaean Cultures******Historical Perspectives*** **4*****Landscapes of Knossos and Mycenae*** **7***Scholarship* 7*Landscape and Ideology* 13*Caves, sanctuaries and palaces* 14*'The Ring of Minos'* 17***Architecture and Related Iconography*** **19***Lion Gate* 19*'The Sungate'* 21*West Wings and Great Courts in Minoan Crete* 25*West Wing: Crypt and Cave* 33*The West Façade of the Great Court* 36*West Wing and West Court* 38*Tripartite Architecture* 42*Inverted columns* 43*Paired items* 44*Cult Practice in the West Wing* 47***Iconography*** **50***Mountain Imagery* 50*The Iconography of Pillars* 53*Tree and Column in Cosmic Perspective* 55*Trees and Columns in the Context of Epiphany* 58*Funerary Symbolism on a Larnax* 62*Hera, Tree-Goddess of the Axis?* 64*The Knossos Throne as Mountain, Tree or Stump* 68*'Master or Mistress of the Animals'* 71*The Iconography of Hermes as an 'Axial God'* 75*Animal Symbolism: Griffin (78) Bull (81) Octopus (88)* 78*Hybrid Animal Forms* 89*The Ayia Triada Sarcophagus* 91***Power and Authority*** **98***The Megaron* 98*Symbolism of the Hearth* 98*The Hearth as a World Centre* 100*Leadership* 105***Conclusion*** **111**

## Notes:

All dates are BC unless otherwise stated.

The term 'goddess' is used, without prejudice, for any female of divine aspect.

***Main Cretan and Mycenaean Sites.***

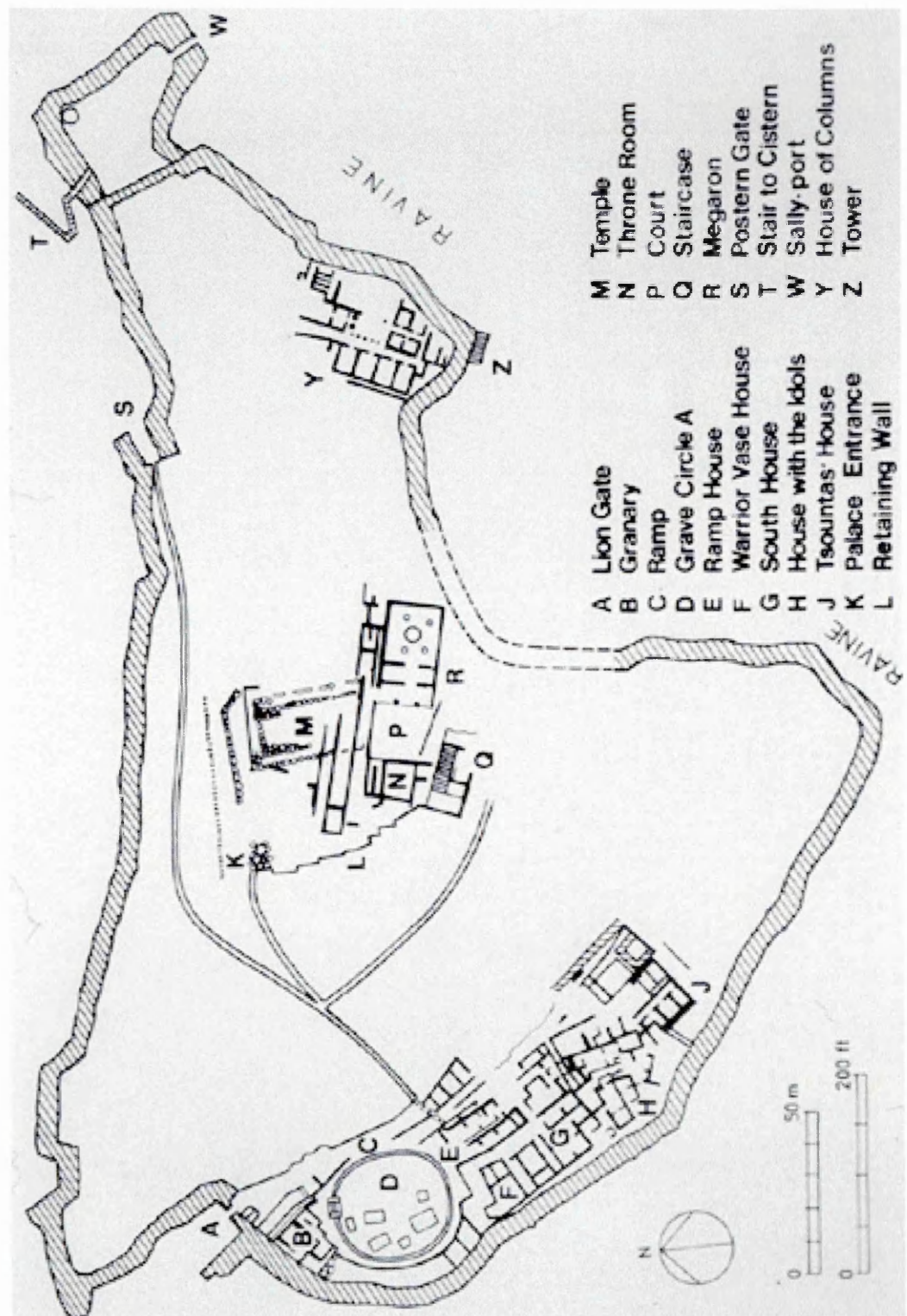


Drawn by Lucinda Rudd.

Higgins (1997) p. 194.



## Mycenae: Plan of Citadel.





### *Historical perspectives*

Two historically diverse cultures are to be considered as antecedent sources for Homer's cosmic imagery: that of the more northerly Mycenaeans (Homer's Achaeans or Danaans, perhaps, whose incursion into the Greek mainland is uncertain but attributed variously to between 2,100 and 1200)<sup>1</sup> and the other, the longer-established society of non-Greek speaking Cretan islanders known as Minoans.

It is difficult to assess the relative histories of the two cultures, likewise the degree of contact and the impulse for change. Migration, a complex process, cannot be defined by restricting theories of invasion, colonisation, or cultural influence, nor can environmental disasters offer a satisfactory explanation.<sup>2</sup> A general model of change is lacking, says Dickinson, but there are some "constants" such as resource acquisition, and (among élite groups) status competition, contact, exchange and ideological diffusion. All are potential stimuli, which taken together with favourable climate and resources, would create wealth.<sup>3</sup> Stability would depend upon the retention of balance among interconnected societies. The expansion of mainland power centres, such as Mycenae, under a ruling class interested in warfare and exhibition of prestige, may be viewed as a response to expanding Minoan influence in the wider Aegean.<sup>4</sup>

The northern incomers (whose pottery was unadorned, their metal work basic) seem to have found much to admire in the elegant craftwork of the Minoan goods they imported. Yet little evidence survives of Mycenaean imitation of the Cretan passion for nature or the processes of 'coming into being', nor do peak sanctuaries or sacred caves apparently form part of mainland cult practice. The presence of Minoan pieces in the 16<sup>th</sup> century graves of Circle A at Mycenae intimates that a religious significance was

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<sup>1</sup> Dickinson (1989) p. 136. Drews (1988) resumes the debate on this issue, pp. 16-24 (archaeology); pp. 25-45 (linguistics).

<sup>2</sup> Dickinson (1994) pp. 295f.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 296. Helms (1988) pp. 11f.: knowledge, and exotic goods acquired from travel to far territories, confer particular prestige and authority.

<sup>4</sup> Dickinson (1994) pp. 297f.

attributed to them, and it is perhaps in the borrowed sacred imagery, or the importation of Cretan craftsmen,<sup>5</sup> that the new civilisation found some legitimising iconography of power and tokens of immortality.

In the most general terms, it appears that by the late MM period the quantity of such exchanges had led to some overlapping of motifs, but the mainlanders continued to express their more combative personality through scenes of hunting and warfare apparently of less interest to their Cretan neighbours. The feminine image is less dominant there, and the horse, warrior and chariot appear more frequently in Mycenaean pieces than in Minoan.<sup>6</sup> Where Minoan art was free-flowing, the Mycenaean was more static and hieratical. The four-pillared Mycenaean megaron has no exact counterpart in Crete; moreover, the cyclopean walls of their high citadels, the small cult centres and the graduated entry to the megara were less welcoming to the populace than the inner and outer courts of the Minoan palace, which could in theory host substantial gatherings.<sup>7</sup> Spatial analysis suggests a more selective exercise of cult and power on the mainland,<sup>8</sup> though it is difficult to be precise about events following the Mycenaean takeover of the Minoan palaces circa 1450.

The present study will not concern itself with any comparison or contrast of the two civilisations, nor is a conflation of the two any part of our purpose. Rather is it intended that a selection of monuments be examined for evidence that a shared concept of a celestial link between sacred place and sacred source was an ideological reality for both cultures. Crete, as the older settled culture, and its rich remains, provides the bulk of our evidence.

The cities and citadels of this age would not be alone in creating such a cosmic

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<sup>5</sup> Laffineur (1990/91).

<sup>6</sup> Drews (1988) p. 81, *passim*. The horse was imported into Greece and Anatolia in the second millennium, initially as a draft animal. Ibid. pp. 160f.; 170ff.: chariots are attested ( Shaft Grave *stelai* at Mycenae) but it is not certain how they were used.

<sup>7</sup> Driessen (2002) and *Athena Review* 3. Gesell (1987) p. 126, note 12, rough-estimated 5,000 people able to stand in the inner courts of Knossos, Phaistos and Mallia.

<sup>8</sup> Palyvou, *Function*.

model. Examples abound, in other civilisations, of architectural recreations of the 'centre of the world' where the four compass points allied to the fifth, the centre, create a 'fivesquare city'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Cfs. Dougherty (1980) pp. 1-8. L'Orange (1953) pp. 1-27. Wheatley (1971). **Appendix 1, p. 4.**

## *Landscapes of Knossos and Mycenae*

### *Scholarship*

That the Cretan palaces, in particular Knossos, were ‘cosmicised,’ that is, modelled on cosmic structures, is strongly argued by Day and Wilson (2002), Soles (1995) and Helms (1993).

**Peter M. Day** and **David E. Wilson** address their initial inquiry to the long, Prepalatial phase of Knossos as an ancestral site embodying the memories of the populace. They give particular attention to the city’s early relationship to the landscape, with a view to establishing the meaning of the original complex. It is stressed that the key to understanding the site consists of establishing how successive generations ‘read’ the landscape and incorporated their findings with those of earlier inhabitants.<sup>10</sup> The authors identify a transformation from religious to political and economic considerations. The site carries layered references to memory and craft production, with the status value of those crafts contributing to an ideology which became a legitimising force. By means of repeated ritual designed to sustain the original order of the cosmos and retain the metaphors of landscape, the society itself was reaffirmed and stabilised through ancestral tradition.<sup>11</sup> The authors find support for their hypothesis in empirical evidence on site of elaborate drinking ceremonies which link Pre- and Post-Palatial rituals.<sup>12</sup>

By this analysis, Minoan society was sustained by an interrelation of political, religious and economic structures. There rests the question of the priority of each or any of these three elements: does the secular dominate the profane, they ask, or the reverse? Here the basic, early form of the palace testifies to exclusive design intended to demarcate a separate, sacred centre. The north-south alignment and an east-west axis of

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<sup>10</sup> Day and Wilson (2002) p. 144.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. pp. 143-148.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. pp. 148-152.

the palaces,<sup>13</sup> which harvested the symbolism of sunlight served to create a landscape-based “place of creation of the world or cosmos... a cosmological centre”,<sup>14</sup> much as advanced by Soles in an earlier article.

Day and Wilson’s article is an important contribution to understanding Knossos as a cosmic centre. Their arguments, which relate settlement and ideology to *landscape*, stress visible mountain heights and solar alignments as features which both root the community in a chosen position and assure the continuity of its traditions.

Jeffery Soles’ interpretation of Knossos (1995) as a culturally dominant ‘cosmological centre’ rests initially upon evidence of replication by its neighbours: architecture, artefacts and dress all found their imitators in Cretan palatial centres and on the Greek mainland.<sup>15</sup> A shrine on the Knossian model with a columnar room above a pillar crypt, the lustral basin, and *adyton*, all found a place at other palaces, and architectural and decorative motifs also travelled far afield.<sup>16</sup> The pier-and-door partition of the place popularly known as the ‘Throne Room’ of Knossos,<sup>17</sup> the griffin, and the tapering column are among other features which found their way to the mainland megara. High status craft objects in precious metals and semi-precious stones appear to have been treasured in their new homes long after Knossos had fallen, he records.<sup>18</sup>

The widespread diffusion is attributed to an ideological impulse.<sup>19</sup> Ethnographic parallels are proposed as a first line of enquiry, with which the archaeological data may then be compared or contrasted. Soles emphasises the truth inherent in those *universal*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. pp. 157f. J.W. Shaw (1973) pp. 56-59. Preziosi (1983) p. 502.

<sup>14</sup> Day and Wilson (2002) p. 148.

<sup>15</sup> Soles (2002) Gournia’s Central Court is identified as an imitation of Knossos’.

<sup>16</sup> Soles (1995) pp. 405f.

<sup>17</sup> There is no evidence to confirm a ‘regal’ use of the ‘throne’. Niemeier (1987) pp.163-167.

<sup>18</sup> Soles (1995) p. 406f. Niemeier (1987) pp. 163-7, believes the Throne room complex to be older (18<sup>th</sup>. c.) than the Mycenaean megaron, and cites (p. 167) the placement of ‘thrones’ on the right hand walls of megara.

<sup>19</sup> Soles (1995) pp. 407f..

*patterns* which can be determined by comparison of many different cultures.<sup>20</sup>

The pattern chosen by Soles is the *élite* centre, which in his view is “nearly always a cosmological center”.<sup>21</sup> Typical of such centres is the establishment of an interface between the phenomenological world and the spiritual. Evinced in evidence are comparanda relating to the southern states of America, to Aztec and Incan civilisations, as well as those of ancient Mesopotamia and Japan, in which matters Mircea Eliade is cited as an authority on shamanic practice and the power of the central place.<sup>22</sup>

Knossos is identified as a cosmological centre on the evidence of its ancient foundation, which makes it a place of cultural origins. Ritual performances, which actualised cosmic realities, reinforced the spiritual bond at the same time as introducing those powers into the mundane sphere as an agent of control, he argues.

But it is the evidence of pillar and tree cult which enables Soles to bring Knossos into the order of those centres which desire to replicate the “cosmic axis of the world”.<sup>23</sup> Again the authority quoted is Eliade.<sup>24</sup> Soles’ claim (reinforced by Helms’ analyses of horizontal and vertical axes),<sup>25</sup> is that ethnography both describes and *explains* prehistoric patterns (“through scientific explanation”). This is advanced as a better tool for understanding Aegean examples than iconographic evidence alone. This will not I believe pass unchallenged.<sup>26</sup> His conclusions are not necessarily wrong but a firmer footing in the material evidence would inspire confidence.

The lustral basin complex in which a light shaft does duty as a cosmic pillar is proposed by Soles<sup>27</sup> as the equivalent of the shaman’s axis of travel in ecstatic flight. This in my view is the most perceptive part of Soles’ argument and goes some way

<sup>20</sup> His claims for universalism are based on a small selection of examples. Cf. Trigger (2003): I, p. 11; pp. 31-33.

<sup>21</sup> Soles (1995) p. 408.

<sup>22</sup> *Images, Patterns, and Shamanism*.

<sup>23</sup> Soles (1995) p. 413.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p. 413. note 50.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. p. 409. Helms (1993). V, pp. 10f.

<sup>26</sup> Soles, *ibid.* p. 408.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 414. V, p. 48f.

towards solving the enigma of the structure of the *adyton* and Throne Room complex at Knossos.

A controlling religious ideology binding together the palatial centres, as suggested by Day, Wilson, and Soles, is separately argued by **John Cherry** (1986), whose examination of the political centralisation of the scattered Minoan polities in a time of stability concludes that a homology did come into being. In general terms, the multi-functional early palaces of Crete bore many similarities to Near Eastern and Egyptian palaces of the third and second millennia, most especially in their use of orientation to the cardinal points and solar movements, and to sacred mountains.<sup>28</sup> Cherry rejects ‘diffusionist’ arguments in favour of Watrous’ theory<sup>29</sup> that not only a flow of information and “symbolic exchange” took place (even where there is only limited evidence of trading activity)<sup>30</sup> but also the adoption of Near Eastern religious institutions.<sup>31</sup>

Each palace apparently exercising authority in an autonomous region and exhibiting some variation in structure, the centres nevertheless functioned within a cultural *koiné*. The extent of the “extraordinary precise”<sup>32</sup> points of similarity tips the balance of evidence towards acceptance of an ideational belief system in which “sacred propositions” were predominant. Homogeneity, such as it was, was the outcome of “a belief structure existing on a scale *larger than any one of them*” (his emphasis).<sup>33</sup>

Anthropologist **Mary Helms** takes the view that every centre links itself to the cosmic order by means of two focal points. One is the terrestrial ‘here-and-now’, and another is somewhere in the ‘cosmological outside’ linked to places of origin and

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<sup>28</sup> Cherry (1986) pp. 28, 38f.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 65. Watrous, *Function* pp. 65-70.

<sup>30</sup> Warren (1995).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 40f.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 28.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 31.

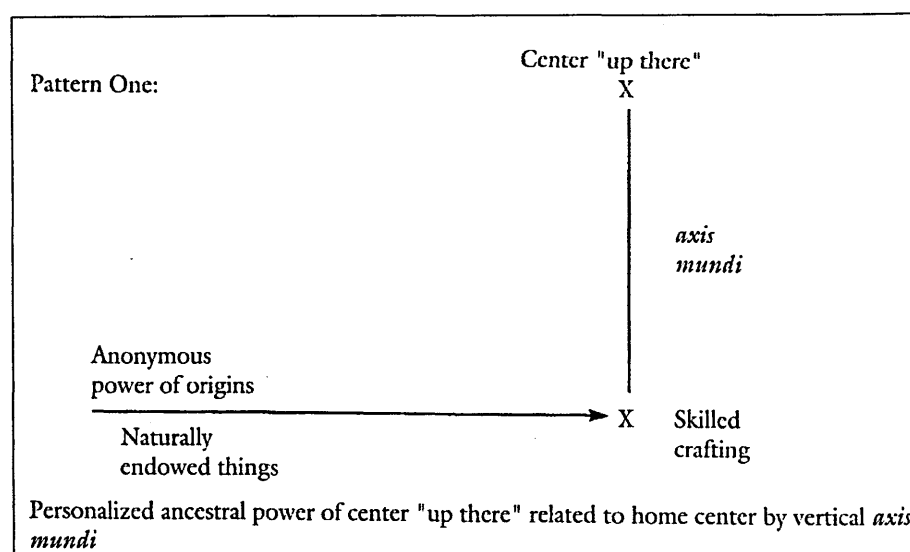
cosmic power.<sup>34</sup> If the outside power is viewed *horizontally*, then the flow is a matter of acquiring tangible objects or personnel from adjacent centres perceived as *vertically* linked to cosmic force (“the centrality of the *axis mundi*”).<sup>35</sup>

Such influence might operate from Knossos to Mycenae, I suggest, and ultimately perhaps from Mycenae into lands under its influence. Additionally, those ‘supernaturally charged’ objects may be expected to be marked in a way that reveals their origin. Certain factors suggest that Knossos could have acted as a cosmological reference point of the kind described by Helms, particularly for its ancient establishment and continuity, the quality of its craftwork, and the extent of its influence on Mycenaean culture.

Helms believes that the ordering of the unknown is a particular concern of non-literate societies, who typically compose celestial models of organisation, including “strongly defined cosmic centres or *axis mundis*”.<sup>36</sup> Horizontal and vertical forms of *axis mundi* are identified and illustrated as follows (V, 1 and 2):

Fig. V, 1.

Helms (1993) p. 178. fig. II- 2.  
Cosmological patterns of acquisition.  
Vertical *axis mundi*.



<sup>34</sup> Helms (1993) p. 173.

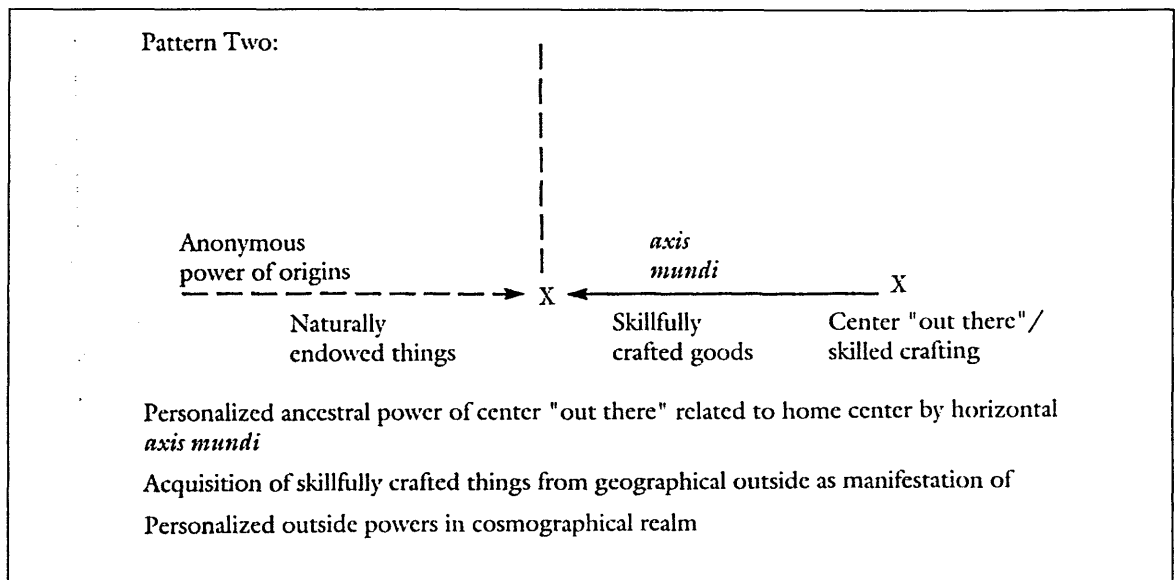
<sup>35</sup> Helms (1988) p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 21.



Fig. V, 2.

Helms, *ibid.*  
Horizontal *axis mundi*.



This formative ideology must have found its way into at least some of the structures and decorative elements of participant societies, I suggest, and will form the object of the present enquiry.

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*Landscape and Ideology*

The landscape location's symbolic values as a sacred centre, on the Egyptian and Near Eastern models,<sup>37</sup> is an idea to be explored. We know that the concept of the 'cosmic' city was well established in the Near East by the middle of the second millennium, where military dominance often rested upon the ability of one city to break the *axis*-claim, and attendant world-domination claim, of another.<sup>38</sup> To judge by the degree of imitation to which Knossos was subjected, the city must have been perceived as a particularly successful example of the axially-founded palatial centre.<sup>39</sup>

The palace at **Knossos** provides fertile ground for the exploration of an axial ideology. The site was the first to be chosen and settled in the Neolithic stage of the island's history. Its founding status and great antiquity, spanning two and a half millennia by the time of the palatial period, gave Knossos special cultural and religious standing; ritual re-enactments of the original settlement which concurrently repeated the myths of creation would have reinforced the perceived associations between landscape, society, craft production and specific cosmic ties to legitimising, external forces.<sup>40</sup>

The landscape of north and central Crete is dominated by the twin-peaked or saddle-backed mountain, Juktas, visible overland from any direction and bearing (from the west) the simulacrum of a male head.<sup>41</sup> In time, there rose a great palace which respected the north-south alignment of the celestial axis, both on the horizontal plane and in the construction of tall, three-storey buildings which included a high western façade effectively closing off the setting sun, and a fall to the east permitting the entry of the sun's rays and manipulation of sunlight at the most sacred points in the solar year. In this way Knossos' palace was located both physically and ritually in idealised inner

<sup>37</sup> The Egyptian temple, solar aligned, kept 'outer chaos' at bay and allowed only graduated admission to the most sacred centre. J. E. Richards (1999) p. 90f.: political, mythological and historical associations "layered" onto the landscape.

<sup>38</sup> Brinkman (1984) pp. 67-70.

<sup>39</sup> Soles (1995) p. 405ff.

<sup>40</sup> Day and Wilson (2002).

<sup>41</sup> Evans, *PM* 1. p. 156, note 1, fig. 112.

and outer landscapes. One way of viewing the expansion of the palace is that the 'sacrality of height' was replaced or supplemented by the 'sacrality of the omphaloid point' (of the conjunction of mountain-axis with the hollow of the earth) when peak sanctuary practices were wholly or partially reiterated in the valley. Either or both could serve as a metaphor for political or religious power, though the valley site gave scope for much more advanced ritual practice and an assertive architecture, in which the construction of a labyrinthine centre of impressive proportions possibly fulfilled for the initiand the pattern of a 'journey to the Centre, and return'.

Similar choices were made at **Mycenae** where the natural defensive position of the low hill was occupied from the Neolithic age but received progressive reinforcement from the mid fourteenth century (LHIII A2-B1) to the twelfth.<sup>42</sup> The city rises between framing mountains, Prophet Elias and Zara.<sup>43</sup> It conveys a strong sense of presence. There, the (simulacrum) head of Zeus may be read as 'axial' because it lies in the cup of the two flanking hills, and may be interpreted as a merger of 'deity (or man) and mountain'.<sup>44</sup> Both Knossos and Mycenae can therefore be seen as original developments within landscapes conceivably viewed as 'sacred' or 'divinised', a fact bearing enormous implications for the conduct and organisation of their communities.

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<sup>42</sup> French (2002) p. 52, fig. 16, Stage 1; also pp. 57, 77-82.

<sup>43</sup> Scully (1979) p. 37, who notes the hills as "horns" of a bull's head.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. The fortress is in the "place of the head of the goddess".

*Caves, sanctuaries and palaces*

The connection between the various Cretan ritual centres is a complex issue. Whilst it is accepted that proof requires a balanced argument, it could be useful to consider whether any of the evidence to hand agrees with the axial theory.

Perhaps the natural features (mountain = upward movement) and cave (=downward movement) were replicated in artificial features (architecture) with the aid of an established ideology and a parallel iconography. 'Horns of consecration' on roof lines and door lintels would replace both the 'horn' of the mountain and the paired peaks that framed the sun and measured the orderly progress of days and seasons.<sup>45</sup> Whereas a natural crack in the rock was revered as an entrance to the mountain and underworld, as on Mount Juktas,<sup>46</sup> man-made light wells were to open the lower world to the upper;<sup>47</sup> and cave rituals could have found adequate substitute locations in the pillar crypt, *adyton*, *tholos* tomb or any such dark place.

Caves used as shelters, burial places, and cult places<sup>48</sup> are attested on Crete possibly back to the late Neolithic age.<sup>49</sup> The nature of that cave cult is uncertain, and too few for our purpose have been thoroughly explored and published. For Tyree, caves were the locus of communication with the divinity throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Ages,<sup>50</sup> but Peatfield stresses the difficulty of recognising any identifiable "deity image" from possible donor figures amongst the votive offerings. In his view any such deity may have been less important than the spiritual experience involved.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. the horn of Olympos, *Il.* 8, 25. where horn = peak.

<sup>46</sup> The altar of the Juktas MM III sanctuary was built over a natural chasm in the bedrock. Dietrich (1983) p. 57. Karetsou (1981) pp. 138-141 and fig. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Soles (1995) p. 414.

<sup>48</sup> Rutkowski (1986) pp. 47-72; peak sanctuaries, pp. 73-98.

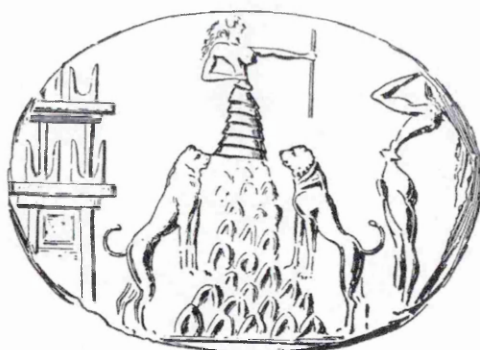
<sup>49</sup> Tyree (2001) p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>51</sup> Peatfield (2001) pp. 52ff.

Watrous' detailed study of the Psychro cave and Minoan sanctuaries in Crete <sup>52</sup> has exposed the equal cultic importance of both male and female figures <sup>53</sup> and implied a link between local political structures and their regional shrines. Where ceremonies appear to have followed communal interests, both caves and sanctuaries show concerns with fertility and protection.<sup>54</sup>

Concerning peaks and their sanctuaries, Peatfield accepts the universality of sacred mountains, and advocates close links between 'peak and palace' in the Neopalatial period.<sup>55</sup> The sanctuaries "served" the settlements: "no palaces, no peak sanctuaries".<sup>56</sup> The mountain was a focal point to adjacent settlements, and the loftier the mountain, the more elaborate the offering. In some fashion, the peak and lower ground level enjoyed a symbiotic relationship.



For Rutkowski, high places chosen for the cult of the gods demonstrate that their god was a "ruler of the heavens" responsible for their welfare. The Mother of the Mountain sealing (V, 75, and above) which shows a female divinity 'of the mountain'

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<sup>52</sup> Watrous (1996). Rutkowski (1986) pp. 73-98.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. pp. 109ff.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. pp. 107f, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Peatfield (1987) pp. 89f.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 89.

transferring power to the 'king and his palace', <sup>57</sup> is interpreted by him as proof of the strong connection made between the high peak and the lower settlement.

The question of *visibility* and *orientation* appears crucial to choice of cultic site. <sup>58</sup> It is a matter taken up by Loeta Tyree in relation to caves and peak sanctuaries. <sup>59</sup> With the exception of Mt. Ida (conspicuous from all of central Crete and from the sea) all Proto- and Neo-palatial mountain cave openings (or their terraces), and sanctuaries, were found by her to be visible from nearby palaces or large settlements. The implication is that palace ritual could be physically directed along a connecting sight line to the height of the mountain or contained depth of the cave. This would amount to a multi-directional linear flow which took in the omphaloid hollow of the cave (where stalagmites were often a focus of ritual) and the height of the peak, and included the palace in the functions attributed to the distant sites.

Kyriakidis adds that the peaks were not only visible from the palaces and from peak to peak, but audible communication was possible from one to another. <sup>60</sup>

### ***'The Ring of Minos'***

Where it was a matter of defining the sacred place on earth, surviving iconography offers evidence of a cult of trees, baetylic stones and pillar-like structures within some form of enclosure (V, 27, 1-20, p. 56.). Cult is enacted on high ground in the disputed but now generally accepted 'Ring of Minos' (V, 3) <sup>61</sup> where height, buildings, sky and sea, tree and baetyl, appear in the context of apparent ecstatic performance. Sacred buildings mark the central and flanking locations within the scheme, and the 'goddess' in the boat (if Evans' surmise is correct) <sup>62</sup> steers another 'horned' structure from one

<sup>57</sup> Rutkowski (1986) pp. 87f. fig. 114.

<sup>58</sup> Peatfield (1983) pp. 273-279.

<sup>59</sup> Tyree (2001) pp. 40f.

<sup>60</sup> Kyriakidis (2005) p. 19. Fig. 5, p. 20.

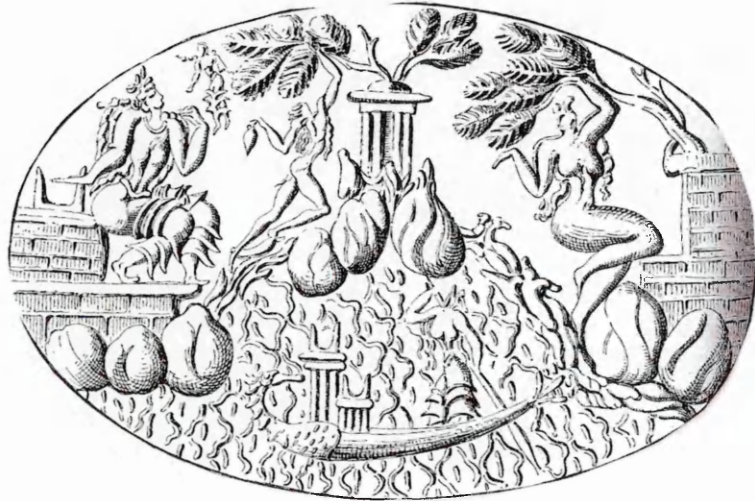
<sup>61</sup> *Athens News*, 05. 04. 2002. p. A10.

<sup>62</sup> Evans, *PM IV*, 2. pp. 950f.

sanctuary to another. Tree-shaking gestures are taking place both on the peak and lower, to the right, in a built environment. Two naked figures are distinguished from the three semi-dressed. Interpreted as a dialogue, the left hand figure (dressed in the same style as the figure afloat) may be seen as the deity settled in 'her' palace and watching the ceremonies visibly taking place on the mountain height.

Fig. V, 3.

'Ring of Minos'.  
15<sup>th</sup>. century.  
Rediscovered 2002.  
Heraklion Museum.  
Evans *PM* IV, 2.  
pp. 947-950. fig. 917.  
(Drawing).



With the gaze of three larger figures focused to the right, the internal movement of the piece is predominantly circular and clockwise. The size of the right hand figure effectively 'foregrounds' her. Evans has suggested that several consecutive units of time are incorporated in this unit, as in the 'Tree of Nestor' - another disputed piece-<sup>63</sup> but there is also a temporal or seasonal sequence in the four sides of the Ayia Triada sarcophagus, which supports the possibility of a sequence here.<sup>64</sup> Evans proposes movement of the naked figure (right) into the boat, thence to the sanctuary (left) where she is nourished from the tree, her divinity emphasised by the descending figure.<sup>65</sup>

The central, tree-crowned hill binds the sky to land, and land to sea, and the composite piece may be considered in the light of the recent research confirming physical and ideological links between peak, palace and sanctuary.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 949.

<sup>64</sup> V, pp. 93-95.

<sup>65</sup> Evans, *PM* IV, 2, p. 950.

## *Architecture and Related Iconography*

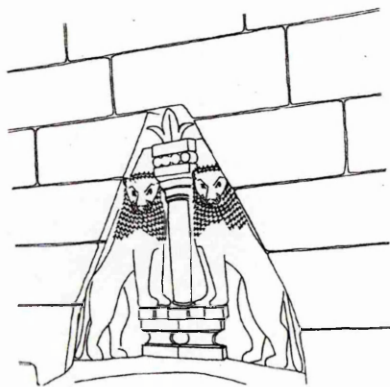
### *The Lion Gate*

The 'Ring of Minos' follows a 'tripartite' pattern of centrepiece and paired flanking figures. The Lion Gate repeats the same antithetical style.

**Fig. V, 4.**

**Lintel of Lion Gate  
at Mycenae. c. 1250.  
Higgins (1997) p. 92.  
fig. 100.**

The massive structure above the entrance gate of Mycenae depicts two lions rampant and forward or outward facing, which flank a central pillar set upon a pair of incurved altars (V, 4 and 4A).<sup>66</sup> The subject and arrangement are Cretan,<sup>67</sup> but the scale of the execution is Mycenaean.



**Fig. V, 4A.**

**Reconstruction  
of Lion Gate relief.  
(Upper motif conjectural).  
Themelis (date unknown) p. 14.  
Drawing, Ch. Kardara.**

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Goodison, *DWS* figs. 264, a, b, c, d: variants on the lions and pillar emblem, including a sealing from Knossos (c). V, fig. 48. p. 75.

<sup>67</sup> The arrangement also recalls the griffins 'framing' the throne, at Knossos.



The meaning of the column and lion arrangement has prompted considerable debate. Arthur Evans added a “protective deity” to previous ‘military’ interpretations of the column, and gave the lions a role as “supporters”.<sup>68</sup> Vincent Scully suggests the central column could possibly represent an aniconic deity or other “revered object” such as a tree or a female being,<sup>69</sup> or prosperity itself.<sup>70</sup> These, we note, are traditional features of axis iconography.<sup>71</sup> Although Bloedow stresses the *subjection* of the lions in emblems of this type and proposes a largely apotropaic role for the beasts,<sup>72</sup> he accepts some religious connotations. His proposal that a *bird* may be the motif missing from the relieving arch is interesting, for it would confirm the column as a sky-reaching axis.<sup>73</sup>

The emblem’s location over the main gate of the citadel lends particular significance to the combined figure. Four roads once converged at this gate, which therefore stood at a crossroads, an equivalent to the meeting of four cardinal directions; hence the gate is a centralising structure.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, if functioning emblematically, the lions and the column-axis must be relevant to the identity and status of the city. Preziosi and Hitchcock suggest that the Mycenaeans had appropriated the column symbol, one of several central “revered objects”<sup>75</sup> associated with the divine (cf. ‘heraldic’ Griffin Fresco, Knossos) at a time when the expanding polity was consolidating the power of its élite.<sup>76</sup>

The likelihood is that another community was here proclaiming itself as living under the power and protection of the cosmic axis. In its liminal position the gate belongs to both worlds, but in its implicit reference to the (leonine) solar gateway of the gods, the Lion Gate advertises the citadel as a place enjoying cosmic protection. The multiple

<sup>68</sup> Evans, *TPC* pp. 156-163.

<sup>69</sup> Scully (1979) p. 37. figs. 63, 64, also links the column as symbol of *the goddess* (cf. Penelope as a column) with the conical form of Mt. Mara framed on approach to the gateway.

<sup>70</sup> Preziosi and Hitchcock (1999) p. 189.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Appendix 1, pp. 2-5.

<sup>72</sup> Bloedow (1996) p. 1166.

<sup>73</sup> Wensinck (1921).

<sup>74</sup> Mylonas (1966) p. 86. “at least four roads start from the Lion Gate”.

<sup>75</sup> Preziosi and Hitchcock (1999) p. 189.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p. 190 and note 32.

references are to the convergence of four directions, on a mountainous site; the pillar giving 'upward' reach, reiterating the mountain; the portal or gateway as a place of magical force in its own right; an antithetical or 'heraldic' combination of pillar and axis with flanking figures replicating a familiar triadic pattern; lions which feasibly represent solar directions. All in all, this is an awesome assertion of the inherent power of place.

As a plastic form, the Lion Gate model amounts to a downward-tapering pillar-axis upon a round or square *omphalos*, namely, an altar: since (under Eliadic theory), every altar where offerings are burnt, and where smoke rises to the gods, is conceptually at the earth's centre.<sup>77</sup> Altars were commonly inserted into the framework of entrances<sup>78</sup> or at approaches to them,<sup>79</sup> which may imply a desire to sanctify the doorway itself via the recall of historical acts of sacrifice.<sup>80</sup>

Above the entablature the round ends of cross beams (recalling wooden prototypes) indicate that the pillar is a form of kingpost supporting an edifice. Evans suggests that this is one way in which the supporting pillar could be regarded as divine, for timber from sacred trees could be thought to contain "the indwelling might of a tutelary god".<sup>81</sup> As suggested earlier, this possibility is supported by the interpretation of Penelope and other seminal characters as original tree deities, through their close association with the household pillar.<sup>82</sup>

### ***The 'Sungate'***

The antithetical lion figures, solar lions, are symbols of the west and east horizons of the sun's disappearance and renewal in Egyptian tradition. Again, Evans indicated the similarity in his 1901 article, referring to the Egyptian *akhet* ('horizon') figure (my V, 5, p. 22) where the (*aker*) lions and paired mountains frame the sun in repetition of a

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Eliade, *Patterns* pp. 372, 405. C.&G., altar: p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> M. C. Shaw (1986) p. 117.

<sup>79</sup> E.g. an altar on the central axis of the sanctuary, Zakros Rhyton. V, figs. 21, 21A. pp. 44f.

<sup>80</sup> III, pp. 51-57.

<sup>81</sup> Evans *TPC* p. 145.

<sup>82</sup> III, pp. 40-41.

solar gate. They configure as 'windows of east and west,' conjoined at the base in variant forms (V, 6) making a single creature, with a base juncture similar to that of the two snakes represented on an ancient caduceus (V, 7). The lion gods are the guardians of the horizon, and as this is the 'place of becoming a spirit' in Egyptian lore, the lions carry symbolic value as tokens of death and rebirth associated with the birth and death of the sun.

Fig. V, 5.

*Aker lions of the horizon.*  
*Papyrus of Ani*, chap. 7.  
 Schwaller de Lubicz (1978) p. 52.

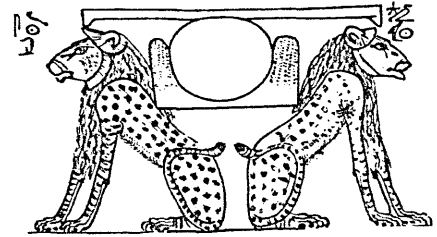


Fig. V, 6.

*Amulet, lions.*  
*New Kingdom.*  
 Wilkinson (2000) p. 134. no. 2.

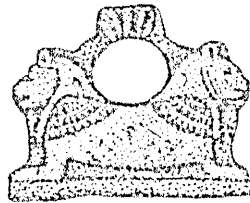
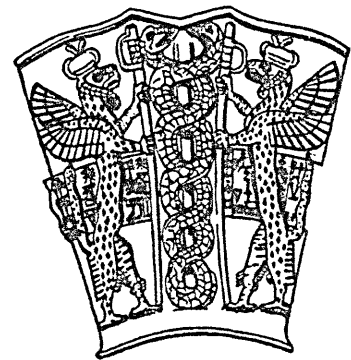


Fig. V, 7.

*Caduceus; green steatite*  
*libation vessel, c. 4,000-3,000.*  
*Dedicated by King Gudea. Louvre.*  
 (Note just-visible central tree or column).



At this point the iconography of the 'Lion Sungate' provides a useful illustration of iconographical method. Symbols may, among their many functions and forms, present as *ambiguous* (as in the atypical use of the cairn in V, 48, p. 75, instead of a central pillar or tree); as well as *polyvalent*, either through the inclusion of several emblems in a composite scene (e.g. V, 27, examples 1-20, p. 57), or through overlapping references

contained in a single object, as it may be in the case of a pillar with tree-like features (V, 31, p. 57). In order to distinguish the content, the separate components need first to be identified then categorised.<sup>83</sup> They can then be examined *in series* with an eye to the principal motifs of the iconographic total.

Following the 'door imagery' above, door furniture can be shown- in series - as a substitute for the lions, and a deity as a human figure may substitute for the sun, just as the divinised Pharaoh does in ritual.

Fig. V, 8.

The sun is entering through the open gate.  
**Papyrus Book of the Dead.**  
 New Kingdom (1550-1070).  
 Trinity College, Dublin.  
 Keel (1972) p. 24, fig. 12.

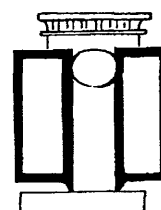


Fig. V, 9.

The sun of figs. IV, 5, 6, 8 above, is replaced by the ideogram for 'god'.  
**Papyrus Book of the Dead.**  
 New Kingdom (1550-1070).  
 British Museum 9901.  
 Keel (1972) p. 24. fig. 13.



The Egyptian portal lions are also seen as the twins Shu and Tefnut, the "first level of emergent duality" from their androgynous father.<sup>84</sup> Architecturally, the twins or the *akhet* lions convert to "the two mountains of the horizon" in the two massive towers of the pylon doorway of the Temple, further identified with sisters Isis and Nephtys.<sup>85</sup> Thus, female deities, columns, lions, cardinal directions and mountains may act in Egyptian iconography as *interchangeable* elements in a single emblem.

These examples demonstrate the many ways of conveying the same principle by

<sup>83</sup> Marinatos (1989) and Crowley (1989, 1995) are exponents of the method.

<sup>84</sup> Troy (1994) p. 7.

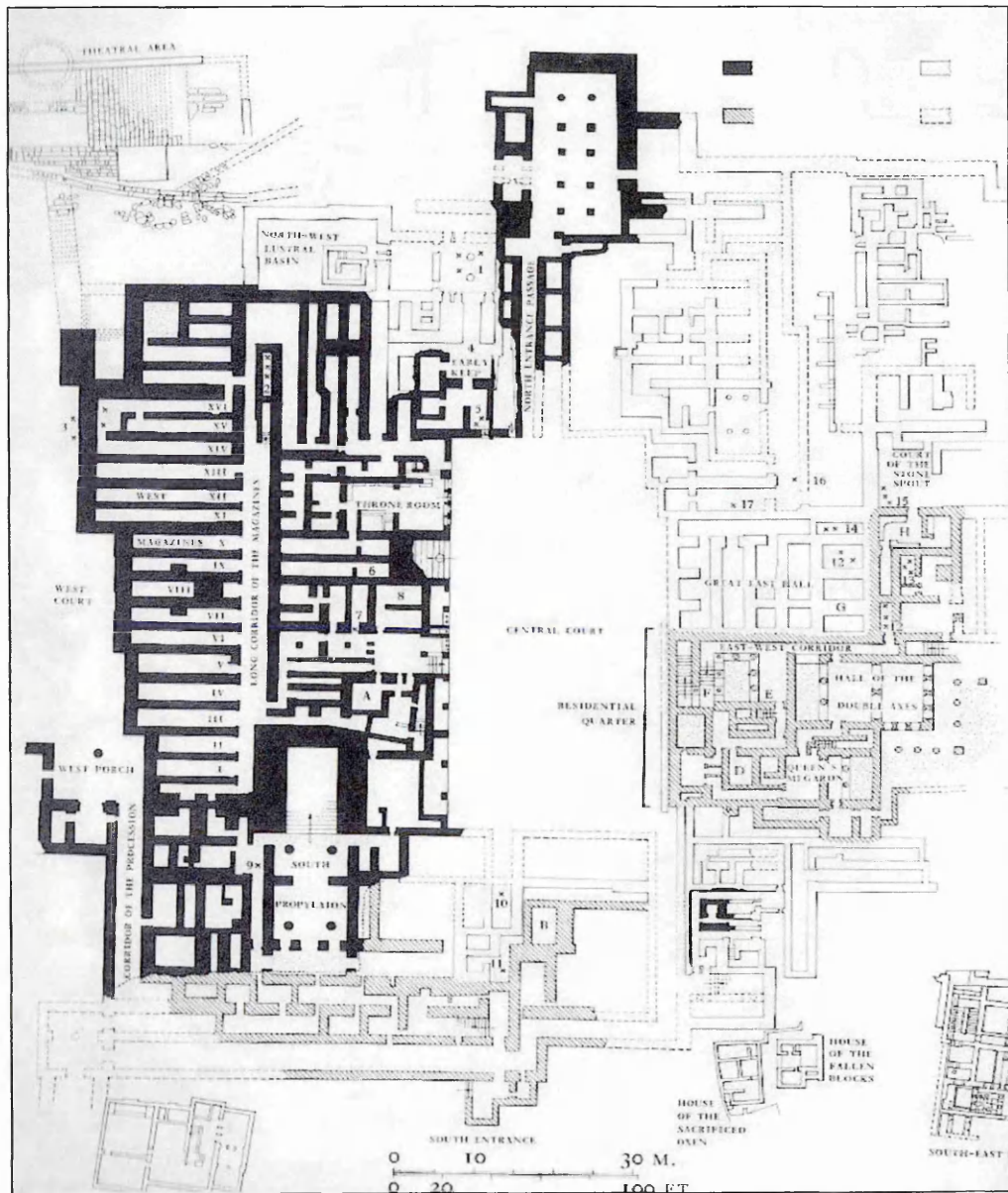
<sup>85</sup> IV, fig. 2. p. 14. Shaw and Nicholson (1995) p. 232. Rambova (1957) pp. 30f.

varying the parts of a composite image. Evans was surely right in seeing anthropomorphic figures in these scenes as substitutes for the central column.<sup>86</sup> Once such elements as these are known as equivalents, they can be cast into new dialogues through synthesis, in patterns which are outwardly unrealistic though inwardly meaningful. They constitute a pictorial allegory.

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<sup>86</sup> Evans, *TPC* p. 164.

*West Wings and Great Courts in Minoan Crete***PLANS 1-5. Knossos****1.****Fig. V, 10.**

**Plan of Knossos Palace.**  
**Hood (1978) p. 1.**

2.

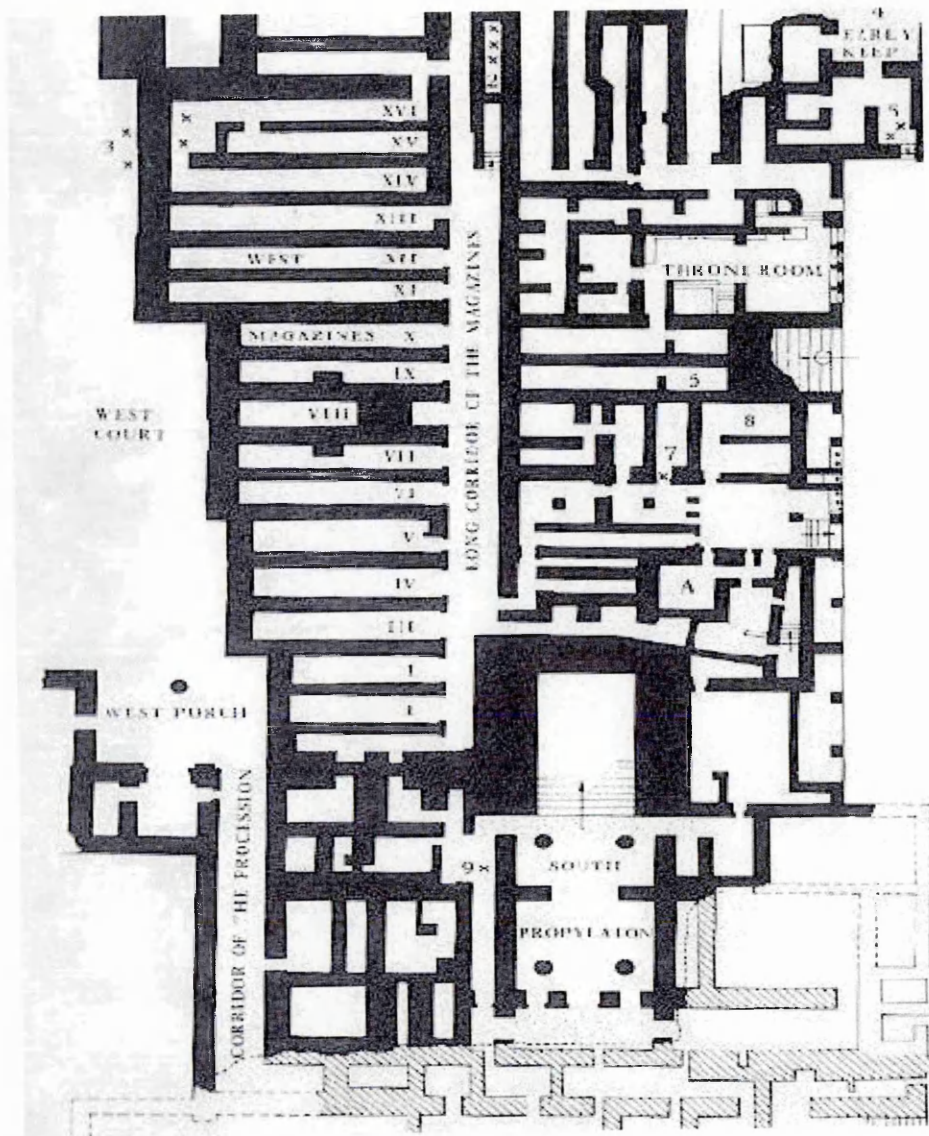


Fig. V, 10 A. Detail.

Knossos West Court,  
Magazines, Throne Room.

Marked:

red: Throne Room  
 orange: Pillar Crypts  
 green: West Court  
 pink: Tripartite Façade



3.

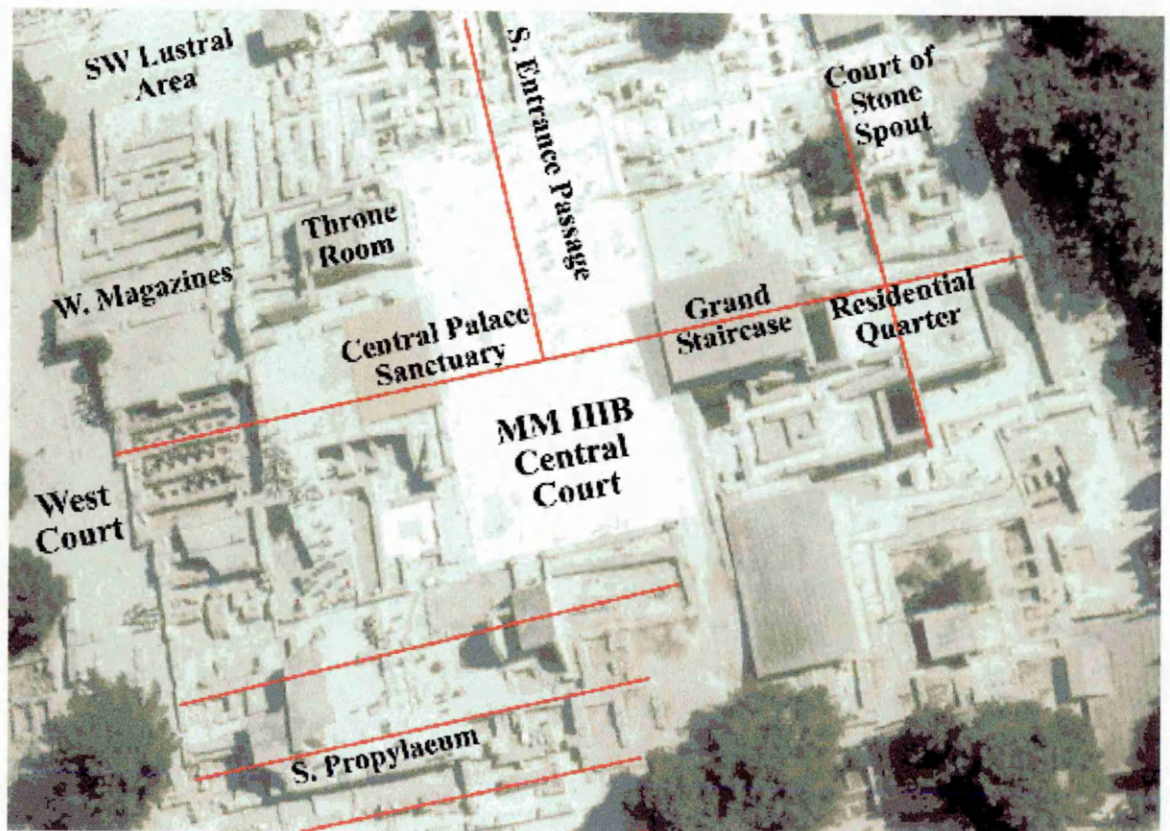


Fig. V, 11.  
 Knossos, MM III B.  
 Planning lines in red.  
 Macdonald (2003) fig. 2.

(NW lustral area and N. Entrance passage  
 wrongly labelled on original).



4.

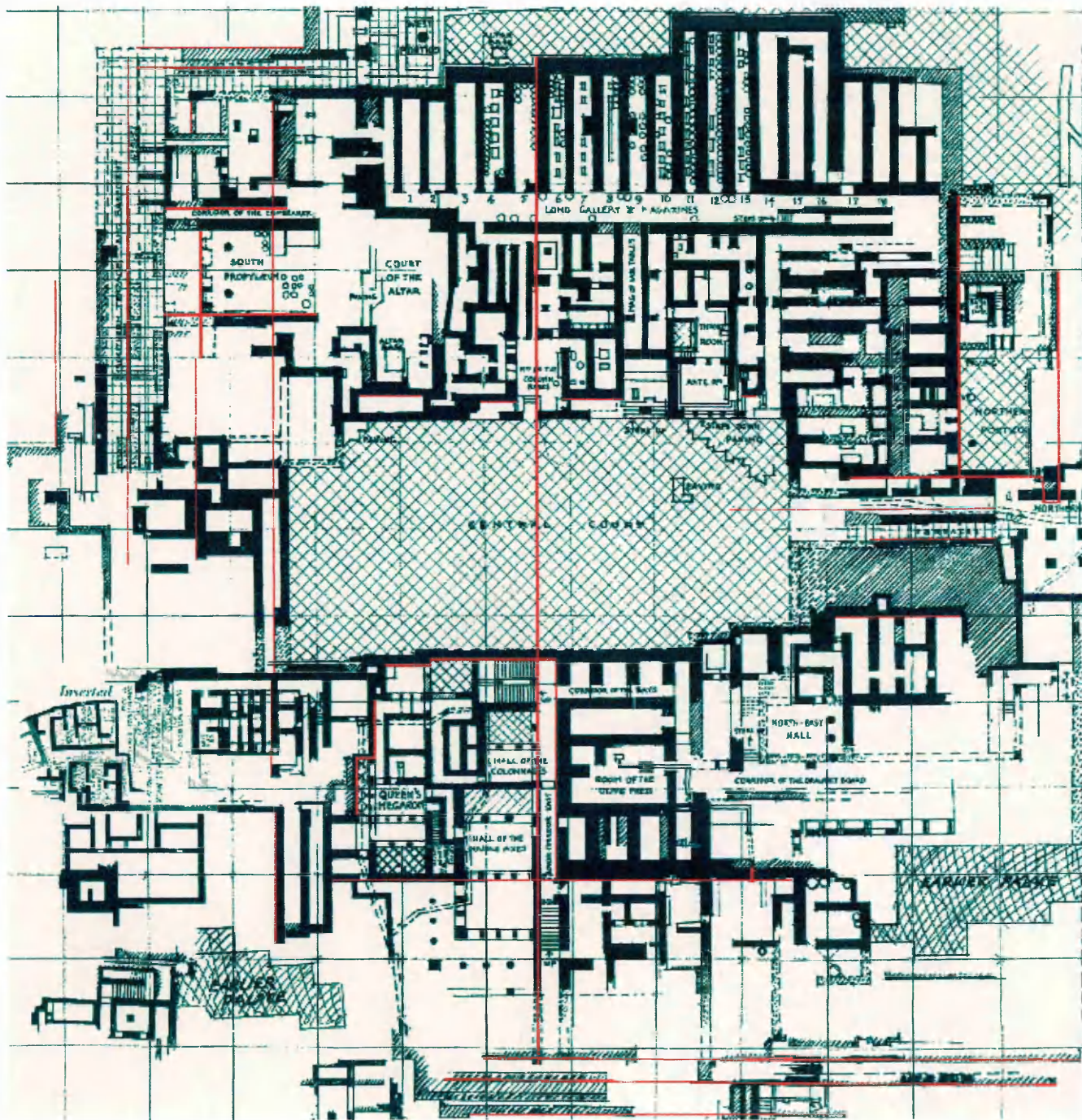


Fig. V, 12.

Plan of Palace, as it was in 1902.

After T. Fyfe. *BSA* vol. 8. 1901-2. plate 1.

Macdonald (2003) fig. 9.



5.

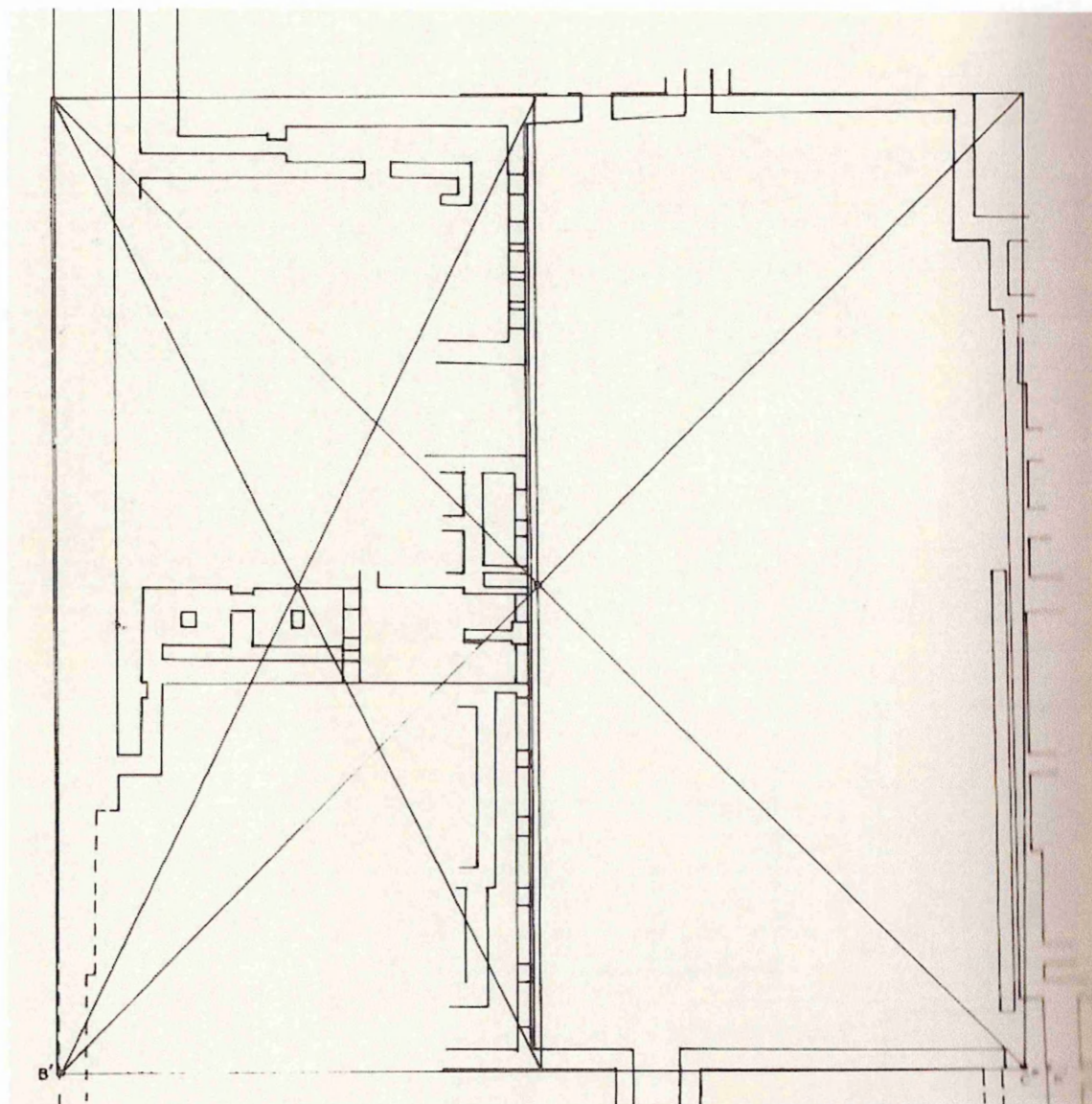


Fig. V, 13.

Foundation grid of Central Court  
and West Wing, Knossos.  
Preziosi (1983) p. 260. fig. II, 31.

Pillar crypt marked orange  
Vat Room deposit: D.

It was common practice in the ancient world for directional readings to precede foundation ceremonies, and for the reading to be made a point of reference.<sup>87</sup> Certainly, preliminary vertical and horizontal readings would be essential for the kind of solar manipulations (using *polythyron* doorways) documented at Knossos by Goodison and others, with the result that the foundation centre identifying the architectural with the cosmic centre would have been the 'World Centre' so far as any intended repetition of the cosmos was concerned.

Early Knossos has had to be recovered retrospectively from the later palace, but Colin Macdonald<sup>88</sup> has projected a MM IIIB plan which suggests that the *north-south* dividing line passed centrally, midway between the original walls of the North Entrance passage (V, 11). The *east-west* axis passed through the Lobby of the Stone Seat (throne) to join the due centre of the Central Palace sanctuary via the centre point of the Great Court (V, 12). Macdonald sees this as evidence of a unified design of a coherent structure by one architect.

Preziosi had earlier analysed the bisectonal axes which confirm a central point in the original foundational design.<sup>89</sup> He proposed that the building was planned as a whole<sup>90</sup> and laid out on a grid plan (as in Egypt) using a square of ropes stretched between pegs acting as both markers and *gnomons* to cast shadow lines.<sup>91</sup> The result, as can be seen in V, 13, is a central modular square comprising the Central Court and West Wing. The bisectonal point of the square falls on the midpoint of the Tripartite Shrine. The centre point of the western block lies at the north wall of the eastern pillar crypt, "a primary religious focus",<sup>92</sup> while the Vat Room deposits named by Preziosi as the

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Mann (1997) p. 71f. Readings from the solar and lunar axes, divination via the oracles, and consecration, all accompanied the foundation of a Hindu temple. J. W. Shaw (1973).

<sup>88</sup> Macdonald (2003).

<sup>89</sup> Preziosi (1983) pp. 11-15.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. pp. 15, 91.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. pp. 15, 95, note 158; 506.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. pp. 95f., 419f., 419-432. Evans, *PM* 1, p. 462, stresses the "traditional sanctity" of the place, a deposit pre-dating the existing palace.

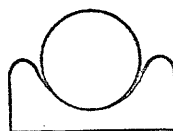
foundation deposit of the palace <sup>93</sup> lie just to the north of the crypt centre point (V, 13, p. 29, D).

Thus it is apparent that for all its eventual 'jigsaw' or labyrinthine confusion, the original palace was designed and executed with geometric precision. Moreover, the location of particular centralising markers (pillar, façade, foundation deposit) at these intersections proves that the design involves something more than draughtsmanship. I propose that they designate *both structural and ideological centres with cosmic values*.

Concerning the north-south alignment of most Cretan palaces, Preziosi asks whether the intention was to align to a mountain top, or to a celestial phenomenon.<sup>94</sup> At Knossos and Mallia the N-S structural placement does not give a direct view to adjoining peaks, although an off-centre doorway in the southern façade at Knossos does frame Mt. Juktas. Preziosi further suggests that the large 'horns of consecration' found near this gateway may have framed the peak itself, and he compares the arrangement with the Egyptian motif where the sun disk is held in the embrace of two mountain summits (V, 14).<sup>95</sup>

Fig. V, 14. *Akhet*, horizon sign.

Wilkinson (1992) p. 135.  
Gardiner (N26).



Therefore the orientation envisaged for Knossos could involve three factors: solar sunrise alignment (E-W axis); courtyard alignment to a landscape feature (N-S); and specific framing of the latter within the structure.<sup>96</sup> As a result of these inbuilt alignments, it was possible for a person to stand *at the centre* of the courts of Knossos,

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 419. Also p. 432, fig. IV, 27F.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. pp. 502, 504.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p. 505.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid. p. 507.

Mallia or Phaistos, and see three mountain summits above the facades. At Knossos, this centre point is opposite the Tripartite Shrine, so that the worshipper's position was "exactly perpendicular to the palace shrine".<sup>97</sup> Preziosi admits to puzzlement as to why anyone should wish to "recreate the ritual siting procedures of the palace foundation itself".<sup>98</sup> An answer can now be offered: the central position is ideologically the cosmic power centre of the complex, and as such, highly relevant to ritual. Anyone standing so exactly would be physically identified with the centre point, and would 'become' the axis.<sup>99</sup>

Two articles by Clair Palyvou (2002, 2004) define the Central Courts as strictly-designed *open air* spaces,<sup>100</sup> restricted but controlled, which connect to the surrounding buildings via perforated facades providing graduated entry, of the open into the enclosed. With a percipient title, "The Supremacy of the Void", Palyvou's (2002) article describes how the geometric centre of the complex relates to the zones of the containing, perforated facades in such a manner as to create varying degrees of openness or communication.

My own corollary to this theory is that the architects had created a sacred arena not only defining the enclosing structures, but intending them to be permeated by the special qualities of the central void. The great space of the central Court seen by Palyvou as a cosmic reminder of the very landscape of Crete,<sup>101</sup> could be actively remembering and reinforcing the initial, centralising foundation. In consequence, performances conducted both selectively and with massed audiences in the Great Court would exercise a unifying, integrating function.

Perhaps one could go further and suggest a cosmic location intended as an immense central and open *omphalos* for the reception of emanated force. And if, as

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 504.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Cf. the Pylos octopus tile, V, fig. 70. pp. 102f. and personifications of the axis pillar, III, 36-43.

<sup>100</sup> Palyvou (2004) p. 215f.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. p. 77.

Vansteenhuyse contends,<sup>102</sup> the courts had a part to play in the political organisation of the palace by control of access and the content of ideas promoted there, the “institutionalisation” of the reigning ideology<sup>103</sup> of which he speaks would draw upon cosmic legitimisation. Moreover, the author’s view of a large “transcendental” aspect to the court rituals of Minoan palaces<sup>104</sup> confirms the likely cosmological importance of this open arena, and must reflect upon the greater ceremonial occasions (bull sports, sacred marriage, or harvest festivals) he imagines held there. Did they too relate to astronomical features and events? It seems more than possible, given the seasonal aspects of any rituals designed to promote fertility.

### *West Wing: Crypt and Cave*

The twenty-nine double axe signs inscribed on one of the massive crypt pillars and others in the first six magazines closest to the pillar rooms, together with the many *pithoi* in the East Pillar room and the offering channels around the pillar base, must signal the importance and intensity of ritual practices in the crypt area. As we have seen, the east pillar lies at the centre of the western square; this apparent favouring of east (over west) prioritises the rising sun or solstice path, the path of seasonal abundance, hence ‘life’.

The dark setting undoubtedly refers to the cave, womb, or underworld. The possibility that such crypts and pillar chambers artificially replicated the caves of mountain cult practice is confirmed, for one, by the transfer of stalactite material, including human and animal *simulacra*, from the mountain caves to the crypts,<sup>105</sup> where they would have added an ‘ideological verticality’ to the omphaloid space.

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<sup>102</sup> Vansteenhuyse (2002).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. 241. Driessen (2002) pp. 4f., 8, 75ff.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. p. 244.

<sup>105</sup> Rutkowski (1986) pp. 50f.

The association between cave and birth, or regeneration, is confirmed by the presence at Amnisos (Homer's 'cave of Eileithya', goddess of childbirth, 19, 188) of a natural omphaloid stone with a central 'navel' hollow, which has been worn by the contact of many hands.<sup>106</sup> In this instance, the rock of the cave seems to have been visualised as a personification of the fertile body of an 'earth goddess'. Some transfer of 'sympathetic' magic may be imagined for the contact.

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Homer may have echoed an ancient stalactite-cult of the 'living rock' when he anthropomorphised the water spirits of the Cave of the Nymphs as weavers of "sea purple webs" on the looms made of stone, feasibly stalactites (13, 107f.). Also, rock formations as 'pillars,' have already been noted in Hesiod's cave of Styx.<sup>107</sup> These two examples lend a mystical function to certain pillars within mythic caves.

An interesting (but late) comment on the ritual function of the cave arises from Porphyry's description of Pythagoras' descent into the cave of Zeus' burial on Mt. Ida,<sup>108</sup> which is interpreted by Cook as a possible initiation rite involving entry by one door as a mortal, and exit by another, the opposing one, as a 'god'. The evident similarity to the Cave of the Nymphs with its two *thyrai*, 'doors of the north and south' (13, 109-112) arouses speculation that the disposition of the buildings at Knossos may have allowed for a similar ritual entrance and exit of initiands or élite individuals of ruling or priestly class. By such means they would be enacting ceremonies of 'cave initiation' in a larger palatial arena. From the north or west, the natural approach from the harbour town,<sup>109</sup> they would progress towards a central, possibly initiatory arena, whence advancement in a southerly direction would constitute a form of 'pilgrimage' towards the mountain, Mount Juktas.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 51, and fig. 31, p. 46.

<sup>107</sup> *Theogony* 775f. III, p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> Porphyry, *Vita Pythagorae*. c. 270 AD. 16-17. Cook, *Zeus* II, Appendix B, pp. 933f.

<sup>109</sup> Evans, *PM I*, pp. 386, 398, 405, 424.

This admittedly speculative interpretation rests on the nature of the elaborate northerly architecture of the palace at Knossos and the monumentality of the bull fresco which faces it, in comparison to the relatively understated southern and westerly points of ingress or exit.

Homer allows mortals to enter the cave by the gate facing the North wind, but as for the South, “no men enter by that way” (13, 109-112). With these lines, the poet may have offered a clue to the orientation of the palaces.

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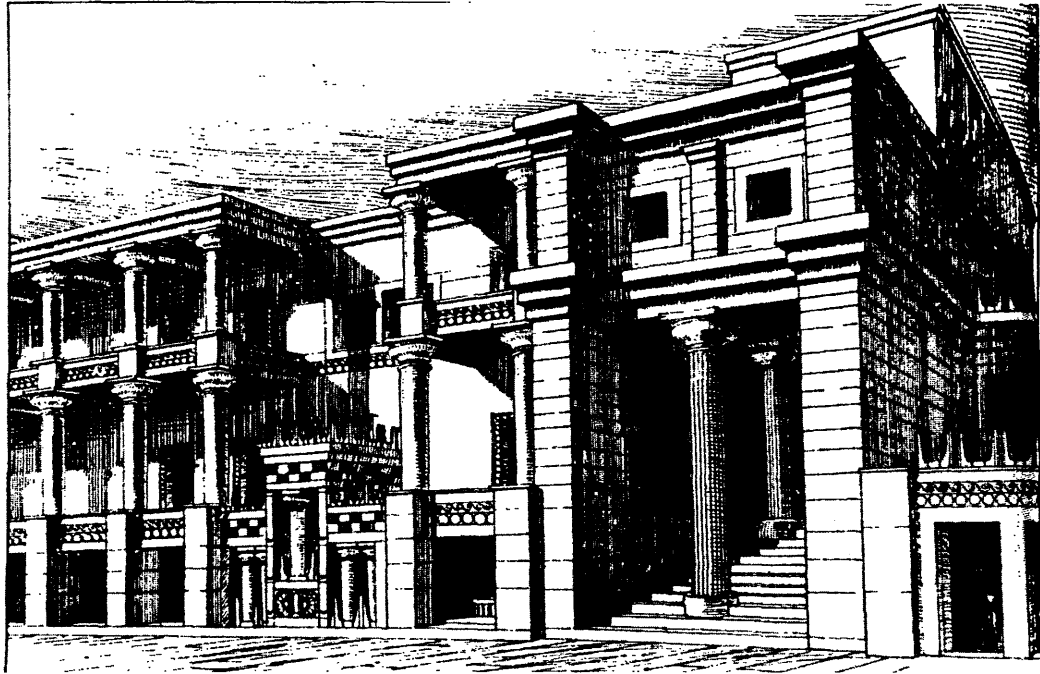
*The West Façade of the Great Court*

Fig. V, 15.

West Wing, East Façade.  
Reconstruction.  
Evans, *PM II*, p. fig. 52.

Major Cretan palaces of the Second Palace period contained a cluster of cult rooms and reception rooms along the west side of their central court (V, 15). The uniformity of the north-south alignment of the courts effectively creates an *imago mundi*, a central point embracing the four directions, as well as a series of “organizing nuclei”.<sup>110</sup> The westerly direction identified in multiple instances here as the direction of ‘becoming’, of the death equally of the day and the life of man and the consequent implications for new beginnings, finds architectural form in the West Wing. By contrast, the disposition of palace centres along a north-south axis, with some of the most sacred places facing or opening into the sunlight from the east (the direction of life and renewal), speaks of the importance to their inhabitants of a terrestrial alignment in which the vertical axis is largely, and of necessity, translated onto the horizontal plane. From the initial axial

<sup>110</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 45. Gesell (1987) pp. 123-128.

north-south foundation, the subsequent solar alignments of specific rooms dedicated to calendrical or festival functions could have been more easily determined.

The Court is therefore both an ideological element and an agent of organisation. This is where the bull could possibly be released to engage with the youth of the community, since only in a large arena such as a court, a place closely associated with the cosmic centre, could space comfortably be opened to an animal of such ferocious energy; and the Centre is, after all, his proper domain, if he represents a power greater than mere animal force.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Graham (1957) plate 79, fig. 14: reconstruction of the Phaistos court as a bull ring. Preziosi and Hitchcock (1999) p. 169, note 16, on rejection of 'bull ring' theories.

***West Wing and West Court: 'Windows of Appearance'***

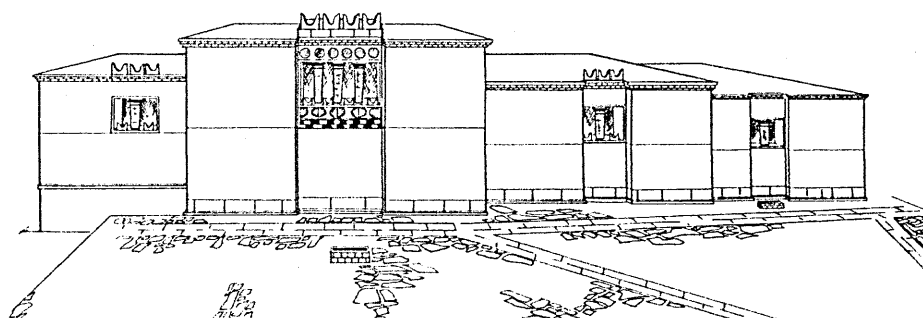
In a proposed reconstruction of the great western wall of Knossos, a "Window of Appearances" has been conjectured, high above the external West Court and giving on to the largest 'sanctuary hall' of the palace (V, 16).<sup>112</sup>

**Fig. V, 16.**

**Exterior of West Wing, Knossos.**

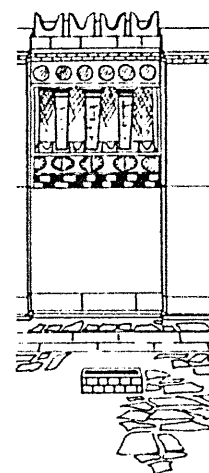
**Reconstruction.**

**Hägg, *Function* p. 131. fig. 2.**



Hägg has suggested that this window followed the tripartite structure familiar from the Grandstand Fresco and projected by Evans<sup>113</sup> for inner façade of the West Wing (V, 16).

A similar location for the appearance of some charismatic figure has been proposed for the West House on Santorini, and one should perhaps include in this series the 'balcony of appearance' from which a female figure, facing left, - or west?- appears to welcome the incoming vessels on the Thera Ship Fresco. The directional factor of the shrine at Knossos (east-west)<sup>114</sup> offers a clue to the nature of the ceremony of appearance.



**Fig. V, 17.**

**Window detail of V, 16 above,  
showing altar.**

<sup>112</sup> Hägg, *Function* p. 132.

<sup>113</sup> Evans, *PM III*, 29-65.

<sup>114</sup> Hägg, *Function* fig. 2. p. 131.

In the case of Egyptian Windows of Appearance, the Pharaoh would appear to the assembled masses in the manner of a rising sun, as he mounted stairs <sup>115</sup> to the window's threshold, first his head and then his upper torso becoming visible. <sup>116</sup> Accompanying texts indicate that 'window' is synonymous with 'horizon'. <sup>117</sup> This reading is further evidenced in the use of mountains, lions, window furnishings or door panels, and human figures, to convey a single concept of solar appearance as we saw in the juxtaposition of my figures V, 5, 6, 8. <sup>118</sup>

Whatever the nature and purpose of the window and the 'appearance' in the Aegean examples, it has to be noted that the architecture incorporated the equivalent of a *Sungate* seemingly opening onto a vision of Eastern radiance. What is more, the presence of an altar before the window at Knossos (and on the central axis of the largest sanctuary hall) <sup>119</sup> intimates offerings or sacrifices intended to rise vertically to the 'epiphany' above (V, 17).

Here we have an earthly equivalent of those cosmic windows or portals that Odysseus the 'doorkeeper' attempted to pass. <sup>120</sup>

Lucy Goodison has tested "the meaning" of easterly aspects at Knossos. <sup>121</sup> The dark Throne Room became the object of experiments intended to establish the role of *polythyron* ('pier-and-door') partitions in the manipulation of light. It was found that dawn light penetrated the Anteroom, and reached the inner Throne Room, when the sun was low enough at dawn, <sup>122</sup> and that it did so between two pillars (V, 18).

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<sup>115</sup> Stairways can represent the primeval mound. Wagner (1971) pp. 9f. Wilkinson (1992) pp. 150f. ill. 1-4. Stairs as "an interface between life and death". p. 151.

<sup>116</sup> Hägg, *Function* p. 131f.: internal steps rise to the balustrade of the Knossos west 'window of appearance'.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Gottlieb (1981) pp. 18-26.

<sup>118</sup> V, pp. 22f.

<sup>119</sup> Hägg, *Function* p. 132.

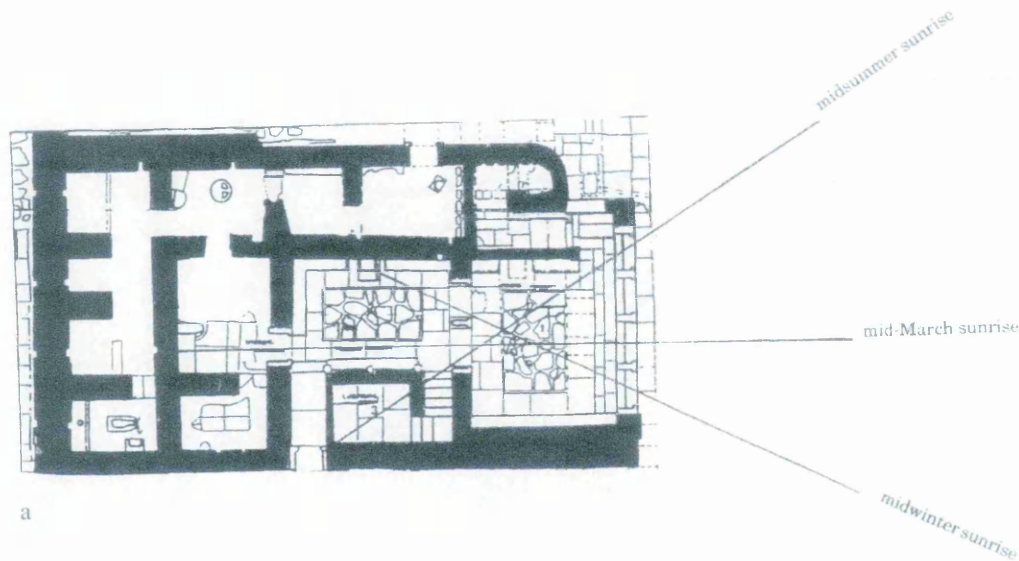
<sup>120</sup> III, pp. 51-57.

<sup>121</sup> Goodison (2001, 2004).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p. 82.

Fig. V, 18.

Polythyron doorway.  
Goodison (2001) plate XXII a.



But any of the four separate components of the *polythyron* could be opened or closed at will, according to required seasonal references to solstices and equinoxes. The result was a dramatic enhancement of the ritual of the solar year via literally ‘highlighted’ sacred places or objects which united the earthly realm with the wider cosmos along the ‘connecting’ beam. The original, static foundation then became a pro-active solar stage with the light beam acting as a visible form of an axis.

The north-wall ‘throne’, made of stone, received the first midwinter light at dawn (the winter solstice). The same phenomenon was planned for the south-east of the palace, and again a throne received the solstice light of dawn which in this case passed through three rows of columns.<sup>123</sup> Therefore the epiphany scenes projected for the throne rooms will have held deliberate cosmic value: “a deliberate and sophisticated engineering”, as Goodison suggests.<sup>124</sup>

There is a close parallel in the documented design and function of the tenth century

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p. 84.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 86.

BC palace of Hiram at Tyre, which provided an east-facing location for solar, hence 'radiant,' appearances of the king-god at the dawn of winter solstice as part of rituals of renewal.<sup>125</sup> The eastern aspect of Hiram's temple was dressed with two pillars, as was the east of the temple of Solomon which was near-contemporary with it. The king, symbolising the resurrecting sun-god, was to emerge from the netherworld with the rising solstice between these pillars, which represented the *split cosmic mountain* (cosmic portal).<sup>126</sup> On the other hand, the dying god of the falling solstice path in the west was identified at Tyre with a *single* western pillar, a gateway which closed after the god's departure, sealing the 'gateway of death.'

Detectable here are ancient images combining mountain, pillar and doorway as *mutual and overlapping* markers of the Two Paths of the solstices. They may be relevant to Minoan solar rituals of seasonal renewal.

The Egyptian temple too was solar-aligned, to allow passage of the sun into the inner sanctum through a multiplicity of successive doors,<sup>127</sup> and we have seen how solar movement was represented pictographically in Egypt by 'doors' of lions or window frames. The *Odyssey* has revealed many references to doorways as places of transition, and refers also to a single stone or mountain which sealed the underworld, which I earlier identified as a capstone.<sup>128</sup> We can now correlate the narrative item, and its contexts, to the ritual use of such structures in a far earlier age, for, with or without eastern influence, the architects of the 'Sungates' at Knossos were reiterating a widespread iconography of the solar route to the source of eternal life, whether that life be plant, animal or human.

I would therefore add to Goodison's interpretation the suggestion that the doorway or door jamb in itself, and not merely as a means of manipulation, drew a symbolic

<sup>125</sup> Morgenstern (1960), p. 149, citing Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. pp. 149f.

<sup>127</sup> Wilkinson (1994) p. 66, ill. 44.

<sup>128</sup> III, pp. 59-61.

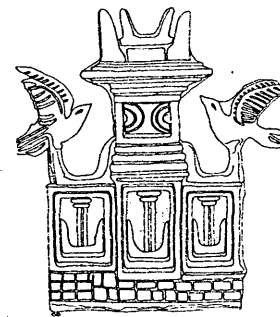
function not only from the symbolism of sunlight, but from the symbolism of the pillar - which could be a notional (split) mountain, or single tree. This would be entirely consonant with other Minoan, cultic usage of wooden and stone replicas of the sustaining axis.

### *Tripartite Architecture*

Just as in the Lion Gate sculpture a central element was flanked and enclosed by paired animals, the same threefold pattern appears widely in architectural forms and body ornaments in Minoan pieces.

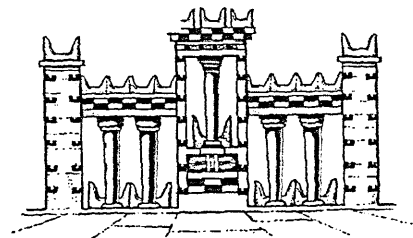
**Fig. V, 19.**

**Drawing of golden plaque from  
Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae.  
Shaw (1978) p. 429. fig. 1.**



Schliemann first unearthed such gold plaques as V, 19 at Mycenae, but it has since become clear that a Minoan original, a tripartite façade, may have been their inspiration.

129



**Fig. V, 20.**

**Tripartite shrine at Knossos.  
Reconstruction, drawing.  
Castleden (2000) p. 71. fig. 19.**

Evans discovered that such a structure once stood on the west side of the Great Court (V, 10, and 10A, coloured pink). This appeared to confirm the architectural detail

<sup>129</sup> J.W. Shaw (1978) pp. 429f.

of the Grandstand Fresco excavated earlier.<sup>130</sup>

Under the system proposed in this study, the emphasis on a central axis of the three parts would reveal the *axis mundi*, whilst the containing (or ‘flanking’) *axes* would translate the expansion from the centre.<sup>131</sup> In the two examples above, each pillar seems to be ‘rooted’ in a containing omphaloid hollow,<sup>132</sup> and surmounted with references to height in the form of birds, and / or the horns or peaks of the mountain. If as we believe this structural backdrop dominated the central arena, it may be considered emblematic of the Minoan ideology.

Two features in particular call for analysis: 1) the inverted columns, and 2) the ‘flanking pairs’ framing the central feature: columns, flagpoles, goats, and birds which extend the ‘horns’ on the Mycenaean example (V, 19).

### ***Inverted columns***

The tapering of the columns in V, 20 is typical of columns at Knossos. Even if they are an imitation in stone of earlier wooden columns, this does not adequately explain what is a far-from practical form of support. If, as seems possible, the design is ideological, we can only guess at the possible intention, but an ‘ideology of inversion’ suggests itself, as explored in recent analysis of the *Odyssey*, and particularly in respect of inverted trees.<sup>133</sup> The presence of this column style at Mycenae<sup>134</sup> may be taken as a measure of the importance of the type.

The ‘sacred tree’ which yields wood for the construction of *xoana*, sacred buildings and even (in mythology) ships, has been discussed in the context of the cult of

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. p. 431.

<sup>131</sup> Marinatos *MR* p. 180. “Emphasis... to the centrality of the column”. Ibid., p. 284, note 36: “Perhaps... an *axis mundi*”.

<sup>132</sup> Or the column may stand in front of the ‘horns’.

<sup>133</sup> **III, pp. 20-24.** Mt. Mandara is inverted to serve as churning stick in the Hindu legend, Churning of the Ocean. *Mbh.* XVII-XIX.

<sup>134</sup> Mylonas (1957) p. 56.



the tree at Dodona.<sup>135</sup> Since Mycenaean and Minoan iconographies both demonstrate a centrality of the tree in cult practice,<sup>136</sup> the memory of sacred groves or similarly sacred branches and / or artefacts may be seen as a driving force behind the iconography of inverted stone columns as tree variants.

A deliberate inversion of the natural order (for trees should be rooted in the earth) once again suggests a desire to bind the macrocosmic presence (above) to the microcosmic level (below). A beneficent power flow in this direction is highly desirable, and would contribute to a legitimization of a supra-ordinate centre on earth.

### ***Paired items in flanking position***

On the Zakros Rhyton the shrine is emphatically adorned with doorway spirals. In flanking position are inward-facing goats on the roof, paired birds (one only preparing for flight), and flagpoles, all of which repetitively frame the centres of doorway and sacred mountain.<sup>137</sup>

**Fig. V, 21.**

**Simplified drawing of architectural scene,  
Kato Zakros Rhyton.  
MM III-LM I. 1650-1500.  
Marinatos, *MR* p. 120. fig. 85.**



This peak sanctuary scene (V, 21) has been given a conjectural three-dimensional treatment by Joseph Shaw, which reveals how such facades were used as backdrops to

<sup>135</sup> III, pp. 15-17.

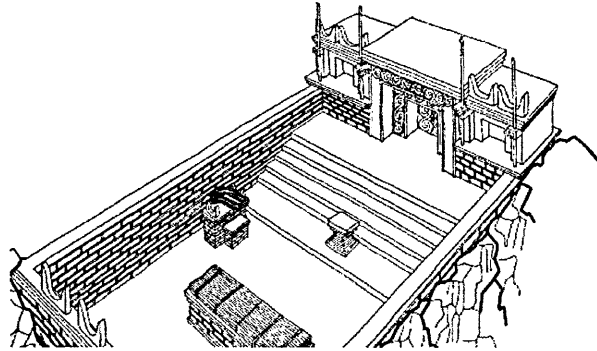
<sup>136</sup> V, fig. 27, examples 1-20. p. 56.

<sup>137</sup> A flagpole, *ntr*, (*neter*) also signifies the divinity in Egyptian hieroglyphic. Gardiner (1994) p. 502.

outdoor ritual practice at fronting altars (V, 21 A).

Fig. V, 21A.

Shaw (1978) p. 436. fig. 9.

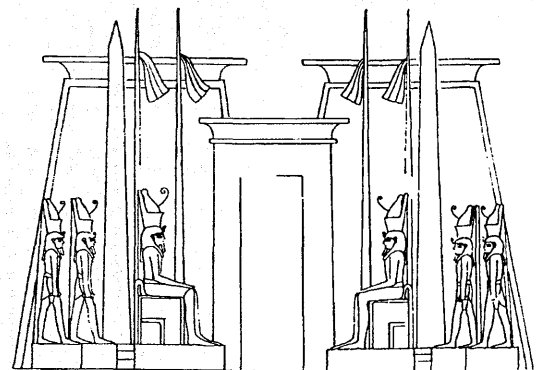


A mountain outline which can be glimpsed between the heads of the horned goats (V, 21) is seen by Rutkowski as a baetylic form of the goddess.<sup>138</sup> It will be remembered that a similar attribute was proposed by Scully<sup>139</sup> for the Lion Gate column (between lions). I believe there is a strong case for seeing column, mountain and deity as variants on a single, integrating concept expressed via a central image.

The **flagstaffs** are a regular element in Egyptian architectural schemes where, with human figures or obelisks, they reiterate the pylon doorways and central entrance of the temple (V, 22).<sup>140</sup> For these reasons, I believe the flagpoles on the Cretan rhyton share the symbolism of the Egyptian cosmic portal, as equivalents of flanking door leaves, lions, door jambs, the split mountain, or the goddesses Isis and Nephtys who can represent east and west.<sup>141</sup>

Fig. V, 22.

Relief, East Thebes. Luxor Temple.  
SW wall of Great Court of Ramses II.  
(1304-1238).  
Keel (1978) p. 127. fig. 167a.



<sup>138</sup> Rutkowski (1986) p. 82.

<sup>139</sup> V, p. 20.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. pp. 84f.

<sup>141</sup> IV, fig. 2. p. 14.

The flanking **birds** on the rhyton from Zakros are differentiated, and may refer to seasonal changes which correspond to rising and falling solstice paths. The ‘bird rising’ would perhaps evoke the rising winter-to-summer path more favourable to cultivation.

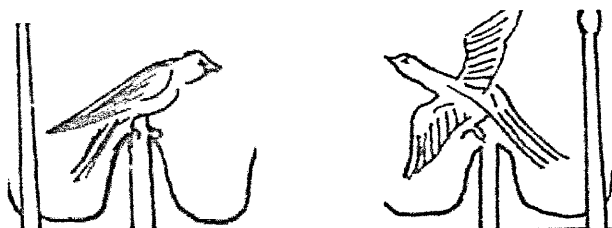


Fig. V, 23.

Zakros Rhyton,  
detail from V, 21.

Two panels of the Ayia Triada sarcophagus offer comparable avian references to seasonal polarities, in a religious context, which may be that of death and renewal.<sup>142</sup>

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The conformity of architectural design and iconographic detail in decorative schemes, prompt a further definition of the central, solar-aligned space as one which places several common terrestrial functions within the cosmic pattern. The over-riding preoccupation with ‘the centre of things’ associates solar time, place, and collective memory with ritual action intended to preserve and legitimate.

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<sup>142</sup> V, pp. 93-95.

*Cult Practice in the West Wing*

The cult places at Phaistos and Mallia could have been entered either from within or from the exterior of the palaces, but like Knossos, they lack space, and were inevitably exclusive. Provision was made for more public ritual at altars in the great courts, but the spatial distinction points to hierarchical levels within the palace community, or to degrees in the process of initiation. The ‘Grandstand Fresco’ from Knossos, a possible depiction of the West Court walkways, testifies that large crowds did in all likelihood gather in the courts to witness public events of a ceremonial nature.<sup>143</sup>

Whatever the form or intention of those events, the palace-temple complex, and in particular the Tripartite Façade which centres the Grandstand Fresco, were clearly relevant to the exercise of communal gatherings. Given the intense reduplication of the axial tokens in the form of pillars and columns, ceremonial doorways and places of epiphany, the West Wing is indubitably the cultic heart of the palace, and the rituals performed there must have been fundamental to the *raison d’être* of the edifice.<sup>144</sup> The internal location, of a visible and *shared* external monument to the centralising axis, such as a Tripartite Shrine, is entirely feasible. It may have acted as a bridge between interior, élite ritual, and outdoor, more public festivities.

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Marinatos<sup>145</sup> proposes that the external West Courts were the location of harvest festivals of spring and autumn, and that the causeways served as processional ways for tribute bearers making their way into the magazines and the Throne Room. The authority-figure, male or female, occupying the throne was “renewed”, says Marinatos,

<sup>143</sup> Davis (1987) p. 160, proposes a “youth festival” for this scene.

<sup>144</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 46.

<sup>145</sup> Marinatos, *Function* p. 140.

in receiving an agricultural tribute in token of the renewal of nature. If this is so, there is confirmation at Knossos of the alliance of 'kingship' (or 'authority'), 'fertility', and 'axial power' that is later exemplified in the travels and reinstatement of Odysseus in Ithaka ('just king' speech, 19, 106-114) possibly even the *hieros gamos* with Penelope at the beginning of the ritual year.<sup>146</sup>

That those rooms known as the Throne Room and Pillar Crypts were at any one time open to relatively few of those who gathered for the public ceremonies, yet physically close to the public arena and accessible as the focus of tribute, indicates that one or both functioned as the inner sanctum, or a 'Holy of Holies' where the most meaningful *sacra* were venerated. Those *sacra*, it would appear, were under the control of a few (or a distinct individual), exercising a priestly function close to the throne, the 'cave-rooms' (*adyton* and pillar crypt) and the pillar, as the cultic heart of the palace.

One way of viewing the enigmatic *adyton* or lustral basin (a sunken chamber), is as the penetrating point of the axis, the *omphalos*. The Knossian *adyton* was accessible from the outside (the north-west) of the palace complexes, so could have served as an initiatory area to be circumambulated by votaries.<sup>147</sup> This hypothesis would make the *adyton* the focal point for at least one ritual. The open light well would permit an access of light falling in a 'column' from the sky to the dark and empty depths.<sup>148</sup> The presence of water, unlikely but disputed, would not be a counter-indication, since the axis is conventionally associated with the wellspring of the lower world. If used as a place for the burning of sacrificial offerings, the rising smoke would create an additional axial column mounting to the gods, just as it would in rising from the megaron hearth. Seated on the throne facing the light column, the participant- possibly a goddess

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<sup>145</sup> Koehl (2001) p. 237.

<sup>147</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 162.

<sup>148</sup> The gallery, hence the opening, is inferred from Evans' (questioned) assumption of an adjacent stairway. At Phaistos and Xeste, the 'view from above' and light ingress are better attested. Marinatos, *MR* pp. 82f.

impersonator-<sup>149</sup> would be ritually close to the cosmic power source, in which instance she would be, like Penelope and Arete, a 'queen or goddess of the pillar'.

There is also the question of the crypt pillars' proximity to the magazines and the access way between the two. With only two points of access, the north ('tradesman') and the Throne Room entry ('privileged') the sacrality of the place is reinforced by exclusivity. The pillar rooms at Knossos and Mallia are recognised by Hallager as sanctuaries where the connection to the magazines was central to their function.<sup>150</sup> In view of these factors it may be imagined that the seed corn and the oil might well have acquired extra 'magical' potency from the proximity to the pillars.<sup>151</sup> Those goods would conceivably be more in demand for ritual or agricultural functions than goods stored more prosaically. From there our speculations suggest that 'possession of the axis,' as a guarantor of fertility, would become an economic and political factor capable of conferring enormous power and prestige upon the inhabitants.<sup>152</sup> This would be an attribute which citizens would happily exploit; it would create a lucrative trade in fine goods bearing the hallmark- one might say the trademark- of the Cretan centre. In addition, such a powerfully sacred place would be respected by aggressors and would go some way towards explaining the peaceable non-military aspects of that society.

The concentrated ritual activities and sacred monuments in the West Wing of Knossos, as well as the court designed as a foundational centre as noted earlier,<sup>153</sup> identifies this area as the meaningful, axial and centralising point of the complex.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>149</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 162. Soles (2001) p. 412f., suggests shamanic trance and utterance for this event.

<sup>150</sup> Hallager, *Function* pp. 175-176: "Purification of the crops when they passed through" p. 68. pp. 174-6. Graham *PoC* pp. 138-142, esp. p. 129, pp. 19-20.

<sup>151</sup> Hitchcock (1999) p. 15. on the proximity of store room and throne room: "an ideology for social domination".

<sup>152</sup> Helms (1993) pp. 46f. **V, pp. 10-12.**

<sup>153</sup> **V, pp. 25-33.**

<sup>154</sup> Yiannouli (1998) p. 73: "the more important the act, the greater its separation".

## Iconography

### Mountain imagery

The mountain element seen on the Zakros *rhyton* relates to other centralising symbols, such as the Knossos throne and some decorative motifs on ceramics. The throne will be discussed in detail later, but its mountain aspect can be addressed now in relation to a 'peak-and-plant' motif of wider application.

The 'peak' is often a double undulating, tri-arched line with pronounced summit. It is seen on miniature terracotta sacred robes (votive pieces) found in the repositories at Knossos (V, 24). They may have been intended for the major feminine deity, perhaps an early Hera.<sup>155</sup>

Diodorus Siculus attests as "ancient" a tradition of sacred marriage at Knossos, in which Zeus 'wed' a goddess then described as Hera.<sup>156</sup> In the Iliadic version of the wedding of these great deities (*Il.* 14, 346-351), the mountain and its flowery vegetation were the setting for a cosmic metaphor.<sup>157</sup>

Fig. V, 24.

Sacred robe,  
terracotta votive, Knossos.  
Evans, *PM I*, p. 506. fig. 364.  
*PM II*, 2. p. 731. fig. 457b.



On the votive piece here (V, 24) which may represent a wedding robe for the queen, the mountain and the meadow have been placed in the only available place, the skirt. An undulating double outline encloses a rank of flowers. A 'mountain' interpretation for this outline<sup>158</sup> can be hypothesised by tracing other occurrences of the design in Aegean

<sup>155</sup> Kerényi (1975).

<sup>156</sup> Diodorus III, V, 72. Cook *Zeus I*, p. 523. Koehl (2001) pp. 237-243.

<sup>157</sup> *III*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>158</sup> Immerwahr (1990) pp. 46, 59.

artefacts.

Fig. V, 25.

Rhyton fragments from  
Shaft Grave IV, Mycenae.  
'Siege Rhyton' in silver relief.  
Evans, *PM* III. p. 96. fig. 96.  
Hood (1978) pp. 160ff., figs. 154, 155.

The same double line repeated in the peak pattern (*I*) of silver rhyton fragments from Shaft Grave IV at Mycenae (V, 25) is often called a 'net pattern.'<sup>159</sup> It could be a rock pattern, just as it is on the 'double-skinned' detail of the Knossos sealing (V, 28 and 75, p. 110, 'Mother of the Mountains').

Evans held that network could symbolise either rocks or shallow sea, but he saw the human figures on this rhyton (V, 26) as "swimmers".<sup>160</sup> If this is indeed a depiction of a 'siege', then both swimmers invading from the sea (*I*) and / or climbing to rocky heights (2) may be supposed.

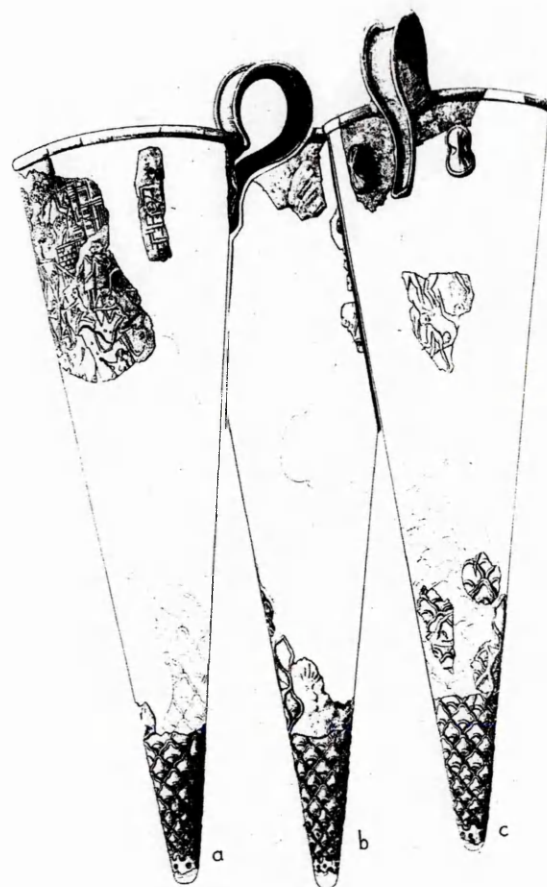


Fig. V, 26.

Rock pattern.  
Detail (*I*) from V, 25.



<sup>159</sup> Furumark (1941) p. 391, III, A. 2. "tricurved arch", discussed pp. 392-394. "Net patterns," 62, II, A. 8-16; "rock patterns" I, 32, p. 323, fig. 54; II, 33, p. 327, fig. 55. "Double skinned rock patterns": II, B. III, A. 2. pp. 325-328.

<sup>160</sup> Evans, *PM* III, p. 90.



Fig. V, 27.

Detail (2) from same figure.  
humans climbing, descending?



Fig. V, 28.

Enlarged detail of my fig. V, 75.  
Mother of the Mountains.  
Sealing from Knossos.



These observations support an interpretation of the throne of Knossos, with its undulating *double* outline, as an intentional replication of a mountain throne of a major god, perhaps Cretan Zeus, where the mountain is ‘fused’ with the throne itself.<sup>161</sup> Any human occupant might become a notional ‘god (or goddess) of the mountain top’ upon taking the seat. The fresco to the rear in the Knossos example would then possibly represent the outburst of fertile growth which results from the divine presence or the successful exercise of solemn ritual. A prelude to sacred marriage, as described in the *Iliad* where the principal gods appear to initiate the process of creation,<sup>162</sup> would be one possibility.

A more conservative supposition would suggest that the juxtaposition of a ‘mountain seat’, an eminent and charismatic occupant, and a highly charged symbolic landscape garlanded with abundant life, represented in the minds of the celebrants a focus of life-enhancing ritual in a precisely designed cosmological centre, particularly when energised by the manipulated rays of the sun.

<sup>161</sup> Cook, *Zeus* I, 124-148. V, figs. 73, 74, p. 109, show god / man fused with mountain.

<sup>162</sup> III, 8f.

### *The Iconography of Pillars*

We have still to wonder at the precise meaning of the pillar which is so well represented at Knossos, other Cretan palaces, and in several villas. Evans opined that it was an aniconic representation of the deity, which seems to have “absorbed and incorporated their essence”.<sup>163</sup> An alternative is to view the pillar as a temporary dwelling place of the divinity, and it is perhaps this aspect which is apparent in the glyptic scenes in which a deity appears to ‘descend’ towards a focal pillar in front of a shrine in response to human invocations (V, 32, 33, p. 59.). The ‘descent’ does however contradict the notion that the pillar constitutes a permanent aniconic presence of the god, suggesting rather the possibility of absence and return under the ritual control of the worshipper.

It will be helpful to follow the pattern we have established for the iconography of Hermes. He travels as we have suggested from our reading of the *Odyssey*, up and down along a solar axis which links man to the gods. Equally, the god (like Mercury and Egyptian Thoth) comes to be remembered and celebrated at crossroads, places which open the way to a significant vertical direction as well as to the horizontal. He was commemorated there with the herm, which was variously iconic, ithyphallic or aniconic, but strongly connected to Hermes’ role as the conductor of travelling souls. It is recorded that Hermes was once worshipped at Syme, with Aphrodite, as a being “of the tree”,<sup>164</sup> which would give the god a further connection with a major axis variant.

I suggest in consequence that the meaning of the herm can indicate- by analogy- the possible sense of the Cretan pillar, namely that the stone, pillar or baetyl represented to the Cretans not primarily the god himself, nor the habitation of the god, but *the route of the gods*, from which the presence of the god in a particular locus could be supposed or

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<sup>163</sup> Evans, *TPC* p. 190: the iconic forms of the pillar, tree, axe, baetyllic stone, co-exist with the anthropomorphic, often seen beside them. (He uses *omphalos*, but not *axis mundi*). Hitchcock (1999) p. 15, designates the pillar as a representation of the stalagmite, aniconic deity *and* structural support: “economy of function”.

<sup>164</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 123. *H. Hymn to Hermes*, 408ff.

invoked.

As Evans infers when he speaks of “the column as a baetylic form of divinity capable...of being possessed by it”,<sup>165</sup> the divinity would not be a permanent resident of the column or stone, but would need to be ritually invoked to find his or her way along a celestial marker reaching from earth to sky. This would be but a small shift in meaning in theological terms but, since cosmic (not a factor considered by Evans), of immense significance in the political, commercial and social domains.

It is perhaps significant that epiphanies may occur at trees and pillars (the vertical *axis*) and at baetyls or stones, as smaller, ground markers we may note as *omphaloi*. Ecstatic communication seems to take place at either or both, as in the tree shaking scenes, or ‘baetyl-hugging’ episodes.<sup>166</sup> The so-called ‘Ring of Minos’ (V, 3, p. 18) shows clusters of baetyls beside three separate shrine edifices. *Positive* actions are seen by Warren in such scenes where worship is directed to trees, columns, baetyls, or squills in ritual contexts, and intended “to summon or gain” divine power through physical contact and ensure fertility in the natural world.<sup>167</sup>

Warren provides six examples of surviving Cretan ‘baetylic’ stones which may still be *in situ*.<sup>168</sup> Several are revealed as occupying focal positions, such as that lying directly on the Court at Mallia before a raised platform with a seat or throne.<sup>169</sup> Stones in key placements (typically an apsidal arch centre, doorways, or in the roadway by a palace corner)<sup>170</sup> may, I believe, confirm both the sacrality of the artefact and the sacrality of the position. They would perhaps be foundational markers relevant to palace centrality. If so, we have a situation where baetyl tokens of *divinity* or *fertility* may associate with *cosmically determined places*.

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<sup>165</sup> Evans, *PM V*, p. 514.

<sup>166</sup> Warren (1990). His figure 6, p. 196 (Arkhanes gold ring) has a small pillar-like object with ropes: a comparison with later *omphalos* stones (e.g. Delphi) is made, *ibid*.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*. p. 201.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*. His figs. 17-22.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*. p. 203, fig.18.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*. pp. 202-205.

\*

Among the many “opposing pairs” recognised by Marinatos as tokens of the life / death antithesis <sup>171</sup> is the superimposition of columnar halls above the pillar crypts, the two being linked by the continuance of the sustaining pillar or pillars into the upper room. She infers a solar ritual as the fitting activity of an upper storey, as a complement to chthonic rituals in the lower room. I can add that the two rituals would embrace the above-below symbolism of the two planes united by the central axis in pillar form.

### ***Tree and Column in Cosmic Perspective***

The living tree with verdant growth appears frequently in Minoan iconography, at the centre of goddess epiphanies and ritual tree-shaking ceremonies, “a focus of action”. <sup>172</sup> In a collection of seals and sealings shown overleaf (V, 29, 30, figs. 1-20) it is evident from the many sacred enclosures with a tree, that the tree itself featured among other subjects of adoration.

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<sup>171</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 97f.

<sup>172</sup> Marinatos (1989) pp. 127-143.

Fig. V, 29.

Marinatos (1989) p. 129 (figs. 1-20).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

In items 1, 3, 4, 7, 10, 12, 13, and 14 (V, 29), plant- or tree-forms either emerge from a walled shrine, or grow behind it. In items 12 and 13, a column or post is present within the enclosure, and may be considered a tree variant.

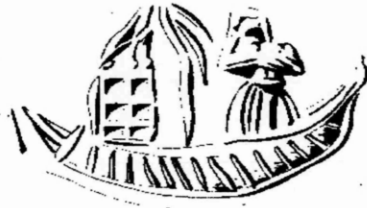


Fig. V, 30, detail of V, 29, 9. Cf. Ring of Minos, V, 3.

In 9, above, and perhaps in 10, the tree is in a mast-like position. Not only do the sacred contexts of these images confirm the tree itself as an object of worship, but the juxtaposition of the living tree with an assemblage of man-made artefacts (shrine, pillar, obelisk and staff, especially in item 12) creates a visual dialogue between a set of interchangeable *sacra* with possible equivalent values, in the context of burgeoning fertility. The pursuit of religious ritual apparent in these scenes confirms the symbolic potential of the physical forms.

If it can be accepted that tree, column, pillar, staff and mast all provide a connection between planes (as argued from the *Odyssey*'s symbolism) then these scenes reveal a complex of sacred tokens that accumulate to mark or create a cultic centre.

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Just as the several *sacra* are compressed into the scenic confines of a gemstone, a seal, or a sealing, separate references may be compressed into a single emblem. This is apparent in the next figure (V, 31).

Fig. V, 31.

**Detail. One of two axe stands shown on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus.**  
C. Long (1974) plate 16.



An echo of the *axis-omphalos* combination is apparent in the double axe form mounted on a tall wooden pole with vegetation, set in a rounded base showing 'marble



striations'. This portrayal of a tree-like pillar on the Ayia Triada sarcophagus evokes the symbolism of the column-tree as an axis which we have met in the *Odyssey*. Combined in the composite figure are references to the mountain (marbled base), pillar-tree (axis), and bird (heavens) which between them unite the three planes. The arced blades, I believe, may intend the solstice paths.

### *Trees and columns in the context of epiphany*

The sacred *tree* as a locus of evocation accords with the iconography of the *pillar* and its worship, in that both serve as foci of ritual activity.

Evidence from epic literature has indicated a matching cosmic symbolism for both trees and pillars, where their functions, despite their variant forms, are similar. This suggests a possible cosmic function for trees and pillars in visual media also.

We now explore some notable glyptic scenes with tree, pillar or baetyl.

Fig. V, 32.

Gold ring from Knossos.  
AM. K 250. 1938. 1127.  
Goodison, *DWS* fig. 259c.



Fig. V, 33.

Gold ring, sealing.  
Floating figure with bow and arrow.  
AM. 1919. 56.  
Kyriakidis (2005) p. 145a. fig. 10.



In two gold rings (V, 32, 33) invocation appears to have had effect, if the 'floating' human forms are indeed epiphanies of the gods. Unfortunately there is no certainty that such scenes as these do depict 'epiphany';

indeed, if the celebrants are dancing, gesture may be irrelevant. Thus an 'ecstatic' ritual cannot be too readily assumed.<sup>173</sup>

The perspective of the pieces is uncertain. Nor can we be sure that a single event is depicted, rather than a series such as evocation, approach, arrival or adoration. These may be actual ritual events, or a symbolic depiction of an imagined occasion. Such problems have been described at length by C. D. Cain in a detailed description of the Isopata Ring.<sup>174</sup>

The contentious epiphanic reading has been addressed by E. Kyriakidis, who tackles questions of perspective and meaning in order to unravel the sense of human figures in relationship to other suspended objects. He works from the view that these *are* epiphanies and tests his assumption through categorisation of the components and epigraphical comparanda. By working from the simplest, least detailed, towards the more complex, he establishes a common identity for individual motifs.<sup>175</sup> Basic forms, direction, and the relationship between identical objects in separate pieces, are his criteria for comparison, and are claimed to be consistent in most cases.<sup>176</sup>

As far as floating figures are concerned, the author finds that they meet his criteria, for with other 'floating' forms<sup>177</sup> they constitute a group which appears in the form of Cretan hieroglyphics.<sup>178</sup> This raises a new issue: what is the relation of hieroglyph to the overall sense of the composition? The use of these sign groups in upper registers of the art work, to denote constellations, encourages Kyriakidis to interpret *all* floating objects as stellar,<sup>179</sup> and the human figure with bow and arrow in particular, as an image of the constellation Orion (V, 34).

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<sup>173</sup> C. Morris (2001) p. 245.

<sup>174</sup> Cain (2001).

<sup>175</sup> Kyriakidis (2005a) pp. 137ff.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid. pp. 143f.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. p. 143f.

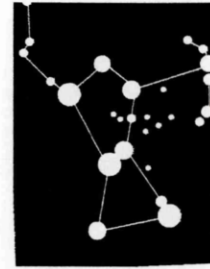
<sup>178</sup> Ibid. p. 148, fig. 16.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 148f.



Fig. V, 34.

**Detail: human figure  
from gold ring, as above in V, 33,  
with Orion for comparison.  
Kyriakidis (2005)  
p. 151. fig. 19.**



Kyriakidis' conclusion is that the scenes portrayed are calendrical, and may show night-time rituals.

Such a viewpoint supports my own thesis that the Minoans were highly aware of the constellations and incorporated their sky-knowledge into the religious ritual taking place in the stellar context of these scenes, perhaps aided by the power of the *axis* (tree) and the *omphalos* (stone).

Kyriakidis' theory would seem to remove the emphasis from the suspended human figure, which would now seem relegated to a complex of like symbols, and (by implication) somewhat compromised as an epiphany. Is there any means of reconciling the two interpretations to explain an experienced phenomenon? Perhaps, for the author does not discuss the known significance of Orion in Egyptian cosmology. The god Osiris is there identified with the constellation Orion,<sup>180</sup> that star cluster referred to in the Pyramid texts<sup>181</sup> as "long of leg and lengthy of stride". Orion once stood at the junction of the two paths of the sky with the Milky Way, and the rising of the Sun in Orion in the spring time made a 'birth symbol' of the archer god.<sup>182</sup>

'Striding legs' represent movement in hieroglyphic and for this reason 'striding'

<sup>180</sup> Shaw and Nicholson (1995) p. 213ff. Orion / Sah, p. 249.

<sup>181</sup> Faulkner (1969) p. 164. Utterance 477. § 959.

<sup>182</sup> Cf. L. Johnson (1999) pp. 66f.

statues were placed in tomb doorways to convey 'movement between worlds'.<sup>183</sup> I suggest that the Afterlife associations of Orion in Egyptian culture (where the airshafts of some pyramids were directed towards this very constellation)<sup>184</sup> may have some bearing on the inclusion of this particular star group, if such it is, in a ritual scene: perhaps a desired transit between worlds in either direction, or the celebration of seasonal change.

\*

Such overlapping of figures and signs, buildings and landscape, action and intention, create irreducible iconographic complexities. 'Condensed' figures may be easier of access.

Thus I return to the cosmic tree, which can be a major symbol in less 'naturalistic' scenes divorced from landscape. Where the tree is 'de-natured' (V, 35), we may interpret a desire to focus on the tree as an abstract symbol, as opposed to a historical reality.

In the Mycenaean example below, the tree is centred by confronted sphinxes (repeating the tripartite model with hybrid creatures foreign to natural life), and rises from small scale 'horns' which provide the enclosing element of an *omphalos*.

**Fig. V, 35.**

13th. century bowl created in Greece,  
found at Enkomi.  
Higgins (1997) p. 116. fig. 134.



**Detail.**



<sup>183</sup> Wilkinson (1994) pp. 24f. and 35, ill. 21.

<sup>184</sup> Lamy (1997) p. 28.

Distorted tree forms, which may refer to a common idea of regeneration, occur frequently on funerary furniture such as the Minoan *larnax*, to which I now turn.

### *Funerary symbolism on a larnax*

A particularly complex ‘tree’ abstraction occurs on the front side of a larnax from Palaikastro, Crete (V, 36) which is divided between a ‘winged griffin’ figure with tree, mountain and astral symbol, surmounted by two sets of horns on the right as viewed, and an elaborately stylised tree or lily plant in a rocky landscape to the left. In both scenes, the carrying handles (for transport poles) have been set carefully into the design where they contribute as flanking or centring components. The mountain-rock design is repeated on the lid.

Furumark classified the left side abstraction as a lily plant, in a state of “advanced geometricization”.<sup>185</sup>

Such complex symbolism on a confirmed funerary piece speaks of reference-layering with a specific function: in the context, most likely the securing of an Afterlife for the deceased.



Fig. V, 36.

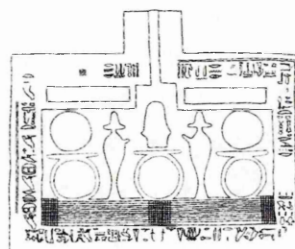
LM III A2 Larnax  
from Palaikastro, Crete.  
Watrous (1991) pp. 293, 295, plate 82a.

<sup>185</sup> Furumark (1941) II, 19. No Minoan prototype can be shown, but it is “ultimately Minoan”.

A powerful route to the cosmic divinity is provided by the *axis mundi*, and this I believe is the meaning of at least one scene, that on the left. If the perspective of the square with tree is interpreted on the Egyptian model (V, 37), that is, as a reduction of three dimensions to two, the result is a tree-form rising from encircling mountains.

Fig. V, 37.

**Offering table. New Kingdom.  
(1550-1070).  
Shen-shaped stands on a  
representation of an offering mat.  
Wilkinson (1992) p. 192. ill. 4.**



Since the mountains on the tree scene number ten, a number also inserted (with some difficulty) in the accompanying griffin scene, also enclosed within a reduced square, the intention may be to establish companion scenes of equivalent import. In such a case, the griffin and the plant or tree would seem to be equivalents of the abstract 'tree', and all three possibly referring to an *axis mundi*.

We note the double axe of the upper register (V, 38, detail) imposed on a base very similar in form to the two-level 'mountain' base of the Ayia Triada tree-axe stand (V, 31, p. 57) which also shared the double axe motif. Here though, the base is repeated twice: inverted, below a base line joining flanking horns or branches, and lower, where the tip of the shaft is lost in an area of blackness.

Fig. V, 38.

**Detail of Palaikastro Larnax,  
fig. V, 36 above.**



This black area is the source of two vegetation forms with undulating, stream-like

stems. I suggest all three bases as *omphalos*-markers of the meeting of planes: in the underworld, and above and below earth. What we may be seeing is the vertical bond which unites the upper and lower levels and creates a sacred centre, with this centre delineated by what it is *not* but to which it gives life, as shown by left and right floral phenomena. The substitution of miniaturised axes for the pollen-bearing anthers would seem to relate the axe to fertility or life-regeneration.

\*

We progress now to consider the iconographical relationship of tree, column, *axis mundi* and female form.

### *Hera, tree goddess of the axis?*

In Section III,<sup>186</sup> there was speculation that Penelope and Arete belonged to a tradition of tree- and pillar-goddesses. Concerning Hera, Joan O'Brien has worked from archaeological evidence of the earliest sanctuaries, such as 10<sup>th</sup>. c. Samos and the Argive Mycenaean Heraion, to establish a pre-Iliadic format for the wife and sister of Zeus, which places the goddess in an earlier context of agricultural fertility cults.

Many a reference is made to cosmic trees or Trees of Life in this detailed study. Hera, for her part, is projected as "a sky goddess", "a cyclical, chthonic earth goddess" and "a mistress of the animals".<sup>187</sup> O'Brien further proposes her as the Mycenaean *potnia*. This is a reasonable yet tenuous supposition, for a goddess named Hera (*E-ra*) is named in the Linear B tablets.<sup>188</sup> Although the archaeological evidence is too late to give a definite link to the Bronze Age, it may at least inform the Homeric imagery.

Kerényi is sceptical of '*E-ra*' as Hera: it may be a place name.<sup>189</sup> He does however

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<sup>186</sup> III, pp. 40-43.

<sup>187</sup> O'Brien (1993) p. 4.

<sup>188</sup> Linear B tablets PY Tn316; TH Of28.

<sup>189</sup> Kerényi (1975) p. 24.

present an argument which places the goddess, as the husband-less mother of Hephaistos ('fire')<sup>190</sup> at an earlier period than the patriarchal stage when Zeus "the father" took Hera to wife. Homer's Zeus would then be a survival of Mycenaean patriarchal order.<sup>191</sup> The "real mythology" of divine beings of primordial time, says Kerényi, must be separated from (subsequent) "heroic mythology". He claims the 'Dios apate' episode in *Iliad* 14 as a genuine tale of primordial time,<sup>192</sup> and Zeus and Hera the "archetypal couple" which predated any matriarchal or patriarchal order.<sup>193</sup>

This hypothesis would project Hera even deeper into the past than the historical world of the Linear B tablets.

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Literary evidence for a prehistoric 'plank cult' of the goddess is but one strand linking Hera to traditions of the tree and column, with their potential cosmic values. Both roughly aniconic and iconic figures are described in (admittedly late) testimonies. Plank cult at Samos consisted of tying a crude wooden figure to willow branches; at Argos and other Heraia her small image was seated on a *makros kion*,<sup>194</sup> merging iconic and aniconic forms. The goddess's *xoana* were carved from named trees, possibly "local sacred trees".<sup>195</sup>



**Fig. V, 39.**

**Hera statuette, Samian Heraion,  
with reconstructive drawing.  
O'Brien (1993) p. 23, fig. 2 a-b.**

Of special interest is the high "shield *polos*" on Hera's Geometric statue from the

<sup>190</sup> Gantz (1993) p. 74.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid. pp. 46-50.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid. p. 43.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>194</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1. 164.2.

<sup>195</sup> O'Brien (1993) p. 25.



Heraion II at Samos (V, 39) which is seen by O'Brien as the equivalent of the checkered *polos* worn by the seasonal goddess in the 9<sup>th</sup>. century 'Tree Painter's' urn from Knossos.<sup>196</sup> Both these figures are interpreted by the author as "the axis of the sky". Presumably the 'axial' identification has been made on the basis of etymology, but no explanation is offered.<sup>197</sup> We have therefore to address the incongruity of headwear *as a pole*; or perhaps it should be viewed as an extension of the body, with body + pole as a single unit.

It needs to be asked whether the figure's *polos* is indeed a 'meaningful,' i.e. symbolic, attribute. The degree of elaboration would suggest so, and we know artistic personifications of celestial phenomena are regularly accompanied by the attachment of identifying symbols of dress, or astral tokens such as rayed headwear.<sup>198</sup> Whilst it is recognised that many divinities wear elaborate headdresses, I suggest that the underlying *polos* symbolism may be accessible via later linguistic history.<sup>199</sup>

*Polos* is "the axis of the celestial sphere" in Plato's *Timaeus* (40c). This is too late to link directly to Geometric images or earlier forms, but may it preserve an ancient tradition, in which the 'pole' of headwear also, is a reference to the celestial pole?

Liddell, Scott and Johnson list the semantic range of *polos* as follows:

- "pole of the axis", the zenith, and inclination of the pole;
- celestial sphere, vault of the heaven, sky, pole star and star;
- orbit of a star;
- crown of the head;
- centre of the threshing floor;
- pole through the axle tree of a carriage;
- concave sundial with *gnomon*;
- windlass, capstan....and so on.

Here is a semantic cluster which has little to do with clothing, secular or divine. But it embraces a comprehensive spectrum of the axial functions and attributes, namely:

<sup>196</sup> Coldstream (1984) figs. 1, 2, plate 9.

<sup>197</sup> My title pages: Aristophanes' *Birds*, line 179, *polos*. Dunbar (1995) *ad loc.* pp. 192ff.

<sup>198</sup> Parisinou (2005) p. 39, *passim*.

<sup>199</sup> O'Brien (1993) p. 33.

- the shamanic alignment of the ceremonial **pole** to the northern Pole Star of the vaulted heaven, with all its associated applications,
- such as the **rotation** of the stars around this fixed point, which makes the term equally applicable to the turning windlass;
- and an **axle** reference evoking the sky chariot, whose axle cavity containing the rotating axle served as an image of the conceptual world centre.<sup>200</sup>

Centrality is evident in application to the crown of the head, which in the Buddhist system of *chakras* (spinal energies) contains the highest spiritual ‘door’ which allows the mind to open to the divine condition.<sup>201</sup> The centre of the threshing hall follows a similar association of ideas in relating a vital agricultural function in the *microcosmos* to the *macrocosmic* centre and its benign influence. The sundial, image of the upper hemisphere, functions via the conjunctions of omphaloid receptor with sunlight, shadow and axial *gnomon*.<sup>202</sup>

‘Polos’ is an alternative name of one of the Titan brothers of myth, Koios, ‘questioning’ or ‘intelligence’.<sup>203</sup> He was one of the four Titans who plotted with their brother Kronos to depose Ouranos, the sky, holding him down while the castration was performed. In this, the brothers probably represent the four sustaining pillars of the sky, like the Egyptian sons of Horus.<sup>204</sup> Koios is subsequently cast down to the pit of Tartaros but aspires to climb up again.<sup>205</sup> As a brother of Okeanos, and of Iapetos (father of Atlas) Koios’ mythic history is sufficiently cosmogonic or primordial in nature to agree with his alternative naming as ‘Polos’, the axis.

I submit that the integrating dialogue of an etymology which confirms a core identity, with the added support of mythic detail, demonstrates a relevant thematic unity indicative of a cosmological aspect of the goddess and her headwear.

<sup>200</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy (1931) p. 172. *Door*, pp. 8, 197 note, 225.

<sup>201</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Door* pp. 24, 199f. *passim*. McEvilley (2002) p. 271, proposes a Mesopotamian origin to the doctrine.

<sup>202</sup> Pausanias, 2. 10. 5.

<sup>203</sup> Apollodorus, *Library* 1. 2-3. Hyginus, *Preface*.

<sup>204</sup> **Appendix 2, pp. 12f.**

<sup>205</sup> Gaius Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica* 3. 224.

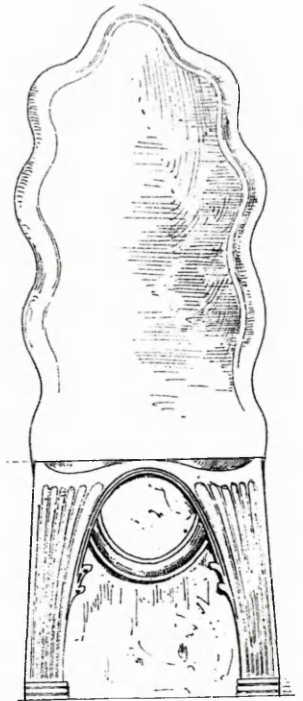


*The Knossos Throne as mountain, tree or stump*

Fig. V, 40.

Knossos throne, drawing.  
Evans, *PM* IV, 2.  
p. 916. fig. 890.

The throne of Knossos, although worked in stone, replicates a wooden article; hence it is both 'rock' or 'mountain' and 'tree', and has several tree-like features (V, 40, 41, 42). The object - which appears to be the focus of considerable ritual attention - must execute a vital role in defining the ideology of its culture, and for this reason any symbolism may be treated as broadly representative.



V, 41. Throne, reconstructed.



V, 42, as excavated.

Evans saw 'foliage' in the buds ('croquets') under the arch of the seat, which interpret the tree.<sup>206</sup> The intention may have been to recall the origin of the wood of its

<sup>206</sup> Evans, *PM* IV, I. pp. 916f., figs. 889, 892. Lang, *PN* II p. 101, suggests "a transfer of the divinity [of] the tree or column to the throne or occupant" in the throne of Pylos.

origin, in a sacred tree. Other scholars are more precise: it is proposed that the piece is a modified tree trunk, an oak stump “conventionalised” into a seat. The back of the throne is seen not as a mountain, but as an oak leaf, and the hollow compared with that seen in an oak trunk on Gortyn coins which also show the crocket ‘buds’.<sup>207</sup>

Whatever the origins or intentions, tree, stump, mountain, stone and rock are too well-established as multi-forms of the axial principle for strict distinction to be necessary.<sup>208</sup> We have seen how Homer was able to make literary play with Agamemnon’s leafless sceptre which “has left behind the cut stump in the mountains” (*Il.* 1, 234f.). In fact, (and by analogy with Egyptian pictorialisation, which cannot be understood without reference to symbols)<sup>209</sup> the greater the number of references in any homologue, the more powerful or perhaps meaningful the object becomes.<sup>210</sup>

As noted earlier,<sup>211</sup> the throne’s undulating double outline is so much in harmony with the mountain profile revealed on the Zakros *rhyton* (V, 21, p. 44f.), that the Knossian throne is simultaneously a notional ‘mountain’, set within a replicating mountain landscape by the surrounding fresco with antithetical griffins.<sup>212</sup> I submit that the remembrance of the mountain, as well as peak practice, and a sense that height takes the worshipper nearer to the gods, may have conditioned the inbuilt reference.

With these three identities, the throne is affirmed as the root-place of an *axis mundi*, or the *omphalos* – *umbilicus* which shows where the axis stabilises itself centrally within the plane. Its presumed occupation by a ruler, priest or goddess impersonator would identify the human element with the divine.

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<sup>207</sup> Quoted by A. B. Cook (1903) p. 406.

<sup>208</sup> Appendix 1, pp. 3-6; Appendix 2, *passim*.

<sup>209</sup> Wilkinson (1992) pp. 10-12.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid. p. 10. Wilkinson interprets a rock vase (his Frontispiece) in which both hieroglyphic and pictorial representations blend and interact to make a specific symbolic statement.

<sup>211</sup> V, pp. 50-52.

<sup>212</sup> A. B. Cook (1903) p. 407f. Castleden (1990) p. 165, sees a deliberate attempt to reproduce the peak sanctuary setting. Goldman (1966) p. 96: the homologisation of stepped altar, throne and mountain in Semitic tradition.

Cook holds that the oracular cult of Zeus “of the oak” celebrated at Dodona and at Ammonium in Egypt, was also practised in Crete in analogous ritual.<sup>213</sup> Concerning the oak at Ammonium, Diodorus of Sicily<sup>214</sup> records that its cult image of Zeus consisted of an old wooden statue, a *xoanon*, but Q. Curtius Rufus<sup>215</sup> says of the same item that it was a *stump* covered in precious stones, “*umbilice maxime simile*”. Here is some, admittedly late, but stimulating connotation of the centralising associations of sacred tree, god and throne, in a modified form named for the source of animal life.

The throne’s placement on the north wall at Knossos corresponds to the most potent celestial direction, transferred to a horizontal plane. In view of the momentous symbolism of the throne with griffins - and the door space itself, as a sanctifying agent - the appearance there of a ‘goddess impersonator’ as proposed by Niemeier,<sup>216</sup> appears a strong probability, and indicates also the use of the adjoining *adyton* in a significant ritual. Its inferior position *vis à vis* the throne would make the *adyton* suitable for chthonic rites related to the lowest plane, as earlier suggested.

Preziosi, discussing the Throne Room, has suggested that in a Mycenaean megaron there would have been a central hearth on axis with the throne, and a clerestory roof above the hearth.<sup>217</sup> In the course of making this connection, Preziosi grants the Knossian *adyton* basin (with its proposed upper gallery) a function comparable with the Mycenaean megaron hearth, as common centralising foci of attention, with (I propose) in one case light, and in the other, smoke, providing the axial connection of the above-and-below.

The door which leads into the Throne Room from the ‘Inner Sanctuary’ is, in reconstruction, surrounded by inward-facing fresco griffins identical to those flanking the throne, by which the doorway is brought into a specific and equivalent relationship

<sup>213</sup> A. B. Cook (1903) pp. 407f.

<sup>214</sup> Diodorus 17, 50.

<sup>215</sup> Curtius Rufus 4. 7. 50.

<sup>216</sup> Niemeier, *Function* p. 165f. Reusch (1958).

<sup>217</sup> Preziosi (1983) p. 96f.

with the seat. It is therefore a power place in its own right, even more so when illuminated by manipulated sunlight flooding into a space from which light is largely excluded.<sup>218</sup> Hägg's proposal that the doorway was also a place of ritual goddess-epiphany<sup>219</sup> certainly accords with what we have ascertained concerning the doorway as a place of power in the *Odyssey*, and in the shamanic and cosmological schemes of renewal at the doors of the horizon.

***'The Master or Mistress of the Animals'***

**Fig. V, 43.**

**Master of the Animals,  
one inverted.  
Jasper signet ring,  
Mycenae.  
Goodison, *DWS* fig. 272, c.**



**Fig. V, 44.**

**'Master of the Animals'  
Lentoid from Crete.  
Goodison *DWS* fig. 272, a.**



**Fig. V, 45.**

**'Mistress of the Animals'  
Preziosi and Hitchcock  
(1999) p. 189. fig. 126b.  
Source not named.**

Mark Cameron has spoken of an integrated iconographical programme at Knossos,

<sup>218</sup> Goodison (2001) p. 83.

<sup>219</sup> Hägg (1983) pp. 184f.

and his view of the essential “conservation of imagery”<sup>220</sup> is certainly born out by the many replications of the tripartite scheme of the Lion Gate. The emblem known as the ‘Master’ (V, 43, 44) or ‘Mistress of the Animals’ (V, 45) of which there are rather more female than male models,<sup>221</sup> is a notable instance. The generally accepted interpretation of the central figure is that of a divinity exerting mastery of animal life. This descriptor leaves little scope for metaphor of the kind we expect in sacred iconography. By applying a simple reductionism, the image can be interpreted as a triad in which the three parts show an axis power allied to a creative duality, and even, at times, a reference to the reversed solar paths in the form of an inverted animal (V, 43).<sup>222</sup> The life force of the god or goddess unfolds from their substance as from the Centre, into the persons, animals or plant life which flank his or her image as the vertical link, to indicate that the gift of life extends through the world’s three dimensions. This is not domination, but unity, and the central figure should be viewed as *creatrix* rather than *dominatrix*.<sup>223</sup>

In Marinatos’ terms, she is (rightly, in my view) “a goddess in harmony with animals”. More tellingly, Marinatos has elsewhere referred to such apparent subjection as “a sign of an ordered universe”.<sup>224</sup> For Alison Barclay, the apparent subjection of the animals arises from their role as “divine attributes” of the central figure.<sup>225</sup> This in my estimation is a perceptive reading which allows an integration of the three elements into a significant unity.

Marinatos sees Circe as a Mistress of the Animals or a close embodiment of the fertility goddess and powered sexual female, like those prevalent in the Near East.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Evelyn (1999) pp. 65f.

<sup>221</sup> Nilsson (1950) pp. 357-363.

<sup>222</sup> Cf. Cirlot, *DS* dolphin: p. 84f. Dolphins paired ‘up/down’ represent “the dual cosmic streams of involution and evolution”, i. e. Two Paths.

<sup>223</sup> Roes (1933) pp. 19f. “[The birds] stand peacefully beside him, [the Master] *or they form part of him*”. (my italics). Crowley (1995) “peaceful control”, p. 487, note 61.

<sup>224</sup> Marinatos (2000) p. 10.

<sup>225</sup> Barclay (2001) p. 375.

<sup>226</sup> Marinatos (2000) p. 10.

The hawk often borne by the latter is linked with Circe the 'she-hawk'.<sup>227</sup> Her reviewer<sup>228</sup> suggests there is an "abuse" of the analogy in this argument and questions the semantic value of the hawk attribute. The processes of transmission being too complex for simple solutions, I note in passing that the bird as a messenger or connection to the heavens has a broad function as a token of divinity, which itself would be subject to a range of contextual variations.

The prevalence of female figures in control of beasts reflects the tradition of the powerful Earth-Mother consort of the Sky-Father. We can add that from the androgynous, all-containing One, it is very often the female essence that emerges as manifestation. But both genders are essential to the unity. Thus, although in epic it is a Penelope or an Arete who holds sway over the cosmic pillar, Penelope is essential to the rule of Odysseus, and he to her liberation from the suitors; Arete exercises her power in partnership with Alkinoos; and Athene, it is recalled, having once emerged from the body of Zeus, is still subject to his authority. The celestial axis must be formed of unified male and female powers, since it generates life.

In funerary contexts the unfolding triad is surely relevant to the hope of rebirth in the Afterlife through the regenerative power of the goddess, or of the life-principle, as expressed by the central figure. Gemstones and precious metals which bear the symbol also indicate the status of the individual and, if worn in life would have reinforced or legitimated his or her standing.

Several examples of the triadic structure are seen in the gold platelets deposited in the Shaft Graves at Mycenae, of which the butterfly, for example, is shown with exaggerated eye spots (which may be viewed as *omphalos* signs referring to the Two Paths), and antennae exaggerated into 'horns' (V, 46). The human figure with doves also recreates the pattern (V, 47).

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid. pp. 32-44.

<sup>228</sup> Papalexandrou (2001).



Fig. V, 46.

Gold cut-out of butterfly.  
1550-1500. Shaft Grave IV, Mycenae.  
Higgins (1997) p. 168. fig. 210.

Fig. V, 47.

Gold cut-out of nude goddess with doves. 1550-1500.  
Shaft Grave III, Mycenae. Higgins (1997) p. 168. fig. 209.



A piece such as this which homologises the 'axial tree or column' and the 'axial goddess' further endows the scheme with the 'axial birds' of the solstice paths focused upon outward and upward directions (V, 47).

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Lastly, an observation on the inversion of one flanking element (V, 43). The same detail is found the Mithraic iconography of the Tauroctony. (Mithraism is strongly associated with Roman mystery cult, but its earliest foundations are Indo-Iranian).<sup>229</sup> A regular feature of the Bull-Slaying scene is the presence of the male 'twins', the rod- (or torch-) bearers Cautes and Cautopates, to the right and left of the central figure of Mithras, "the axis of the structure".<sup>230</sup> Often, one carries an inverted torch, staff or rod, but there exists a variation in which the twins are replaced by paired birds, of which one is inverted.<sup>231</sup> This feature is so reminiscent of the opposed birds and other pairs in Aegaeon iconography that it may be conjectured that an ancient motif is reappearing.

Roger Beck argues the presence of Mithraic lore in Porphyry's *De antro nympharum*, the third century AD allegorical interpretation of Homer's Cave of the

<sup>229</sup> Burkert (2005) p.16. The oldest Mithras appears in the *Veda* and *Avesta*, and in a BA Mitanni text.

<sup>230</sup> Beck (2000) p. 156.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid. pp 165f.

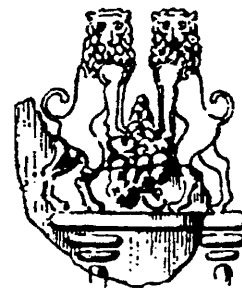
Nymphs.<sup>232</sup> In chapters 21 and 22, Porphyry spoke of Homer's north and south gates as 'soul gates' connected to the tropics. These opposed central pairs, which also relate to the solstices, are linked by Beck to the Mithraic motif of oppositional torches, which make the twins 'guardians' of the soul gates; in consequence the raised torch (Cautes) signifies the southern gate, rising solstice path and *ascent into mortality*, whilst the lowered torch (Cautopates) translates the north entrance and falling solstice path which opens the *descent into immortality*.<sup>233</sup>

I note the correspondence, *as a pattern*, with the iconography of the Master or Mistress of the Animals with an inverted element, as well as the roles of 'twinned' Circe and Kalypso as guardians of soul gates.<sup>234</sup> The opposed 'Two Paths' flanking the axis, which have been interpreted regularly here as solstice paths of rebirth, would seem to have a long history in Mediterranean iconography, even persisting into Roman Mithraism.

### *The Iconography of Hermes as an 'axial god'*

Fig. V, 48.

Lions on pillars, central cairn.  
Sealing from Little Palace, Knossos.  
Goodison, *DWS* p. 112, fig. 264 c.



If a female may personify the androgynous axis power, why not a male, also?

Hermes is here proposed as a possible 'god of the axis'. In various images in the triadic model, a central element is a pile of stones (V, 48).

If this pile is an equivalent of an *erma* (cairn) which gave the god his name, then we are witnessing sundry instances of the Master of the Animals, the cairn, Hermes, and the

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. pp.147, 160, *passim*.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid. pp. 156-159. Cf. the descent of Odysseus.

<sup>234</sup> IV.



pillar, as comparable variants of the axis. There is no contextual connection between them in terms of origin (find place) or chronology. There is however a thematic connection which links them to the Lion Gate image which dominates at Mycenae, where the central piece is a pillar.

This opens the possibility that the anthropomorphic form is a variant on the aniconic pillar, stone or tree. If a cairn can be 'humanised' in this way, we have reached a position where we can justify thinking of Hermes in the early epics as a personification of the sacred pillar, whether that pillar be portrayed as a single column or a more crudely assembled pillar of individual stones, the *erma* from which he is thought to be named.

By way of illustrating the overlap, the image of front-facing lions mounted beside a cairn of stones (V, 48) is given as a first example. Goodison included this piece with cairn and lions in her illustration 264, with the Mycenaean gate and two other pillar images with confronted beasts, by which I understand she sees some interconnecting idea.

The 'cairn variation' substitutes stones for the central pillar. In a comparable model, the central feature is a cairn of stones from which a two tree branches emerge and accompany two goats, apparent lion variants (V, 49). In (V, 50) goats are omitted, but the cairn and branches are retained. In both, the tripartite structure is evident.

Fig. V, 49.

Goats, rocks or cairn, palms.  
White carnelian seal.  
MM II B, E. Crete, near Kritsa.  
Chittenden (1947) p. 107. fig. XV b.



Fig. V, 50.

Cairn, palm fronds.  
Engraved banded agate from central Crete.  
Chittenden (1947) p. 107. fig. XV c.



Figure V, 51 shows the cairn with superimposed rock receiving libation, whilst in figure V, 52, the same service is performed for pillar structures.

Fig. V, 51.

Genii, rocks, libation  
LH III. Found in tomb.  
Evans *PM* IV, p. 455, fig. 380.  
Chittenden (1947) p. 106. plate XV, a.



Fig. V, 52.

Genii, pillars, libation.  
Glass plaque from Mycenae.  
Chittenden (1947) p. 106. plate XV, e.  
Evans, *TPC* p. 117, fig. 13.



A male figure stands centrally on an altar or 'horns' in V, 53, to receive libation, and a three-branched plant is the subject of similar attention in V, 54, which again stands on an altar.

Fig. V, 53.

Genius and winged goat, male, altar, libation.  
Basalt, LM 1 god on seal  
from Kydonia, between horns (or altar?).  
Evans, *PM* vol. IV, p. 467.  
figs. 392, 391  
Chittenden (1947) p. 109, plate XVII, d.



Fig. V, 54.  
 Genii, plant, altar, libation.  
 Impression from an agate lentoid,  
*tholos* tomb at Vapheio.  
 c. 1500-1450. ANM. D 0. 02.  
 Hood (1978) p. 227. fig. 230.



From this series with its many flexible overlaps it can be deduced that a similar function or principle may be attributed to all central variants.

This allows us to understand how a god such as Hermes can ‘be’ a cairn of stones, unlikely as it seems, just as Penelope might ‘be’ the personified power of the pillar-axis.

#### *Animal symbolism: griffin, bull and octopus*

The choice of animals for symbolic scenes may have been determined by the symbolic potential of their physical skills and attributes, as in the Egyptian tradition. Certainly some Minoan forms owe much to Egyptian originals. The Genius Tawaret, the hippopotamus goddess, for example, appears to have been imported into Crete early in the second millennium to become the Minoan genius seen above (V, 51-54).<sup>235</sup>

In the case of the avian avatars of gods and goddesses in the *Odyssey*, mastery by birds of two or three planes created an imagery of spiritual ascendancy. In like vein, we might consider the monkey in Minoan art, the cat, the flying fish, the dolphin<sup>236</sup> or even the bull in flying gallop as further examples of creatures that can escape their natural medium through prodigious ‘leaps’ or climbing skills. The hybrid griffin (lion and eagle) and the sphinx (lion with bird wings) similarly cross the boundaries of earth and air. Shoreline creatures such as the octopus, the crab and the various shell fish similarly live liminally, ‘between worlds’. All demonstrate that mobility of life-forms between

<sup>235</sup> Weingarten (2000).

<sup>236</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 132: dolphin as a sacred “intensifying” marker.

planes which offers hope for human translation to the upper level.

### *Iconography of the griffin*

The Knossos throne stands before inward-facing griffins which contribute the flanking or 'twin factor' to the axial iconography. They combine the head of a bird ('the upper plane') with the body of a lion, an earth creature and a solar-axial symbol of the equinoxes.<sup>237</sup> There may even be a two-skinned mountain pattern at the juncture (V, 55).

Fig. V, 55.

Griffin from the Throne Room, Knossos.  
Reconstruction. c. 1550 and 1400.  
Heraklion Museum.  
Evans, *PM II*, p. 479. fig. 286;  
IV, p. 911. fig. 884.



The curve of the elegant spiral feathers on the birds' necks is repeated in the elaborate and energetic shoulder whorls at the junction of the bird-head and the lion-body, which show rosettes within a spiral. This feature recurs constantly on the lion body, often at the shoulder blade, and sometimes appears on the forehead of the bull as a 'hair star'. Their various Egyptian manifestations range from the full rosette, to the many-armed spiral, a dot within a circle or a simple black dot. We recognise these as potential symbols of the Centre.<sup>238</sup> In the case of the griffin they may indicate the joining of the planes (earth-lion and sky-bird) or even the heart as centre of the body.

The griffin raises the complex question of the hybridisation of forms, in this case, animals and their symbolism. The merger of many attributes in one figure may be intended to intensify the layers of meaning and to establish connections in nature which

<sup>237</sup> The griffin or winged sphinx is repeatedly found with the king and sacred tree in Assyrian art. Albenda (1978) p. 21. fig. 9.

<sup>238</sup> van Buren (1950) p. 55; (1939) *passim*. McEvilley (2002) pp. 252f., figs. 17, 18: eight-petalled "Ishtar rosette" as a shared image, Mesopotamian and Indic.

reflect a higher order.

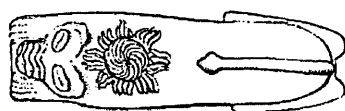
The phoenix, the dragon, the unicorn and winged griffin all exhibit combinations of cosmic extremes- air and earth- and the various early legends attached to them hint at their axial role in uniting the worlds. The phoenix, for example, <sup>239</sup> which was worshipped at Heliopolis as the soul of Re, the sun, also bears the shoulder whorl seen on lions and griffins, and like his close cousin the Egyptian *benu* bird, was associated with fire and regeneration. He reveals himself as a solar symbol reigning over the cosmic column (the *ben-ben* stone) and dwelling on tree or mountain; his land is that mythic country *where hunger, disease and unfavourable weather are unknown*. <sup>240</sup> This echo of the Homeric Elysian Field or Olympian mountain top belongs, as noted, to ancient traditions of the timeless Centre.

\*

Although the hair whorl is a natural feature of the head of a bull or a lion cub's shoulder, 'whorl' designs in art are not restricted to naturalism. They are incorporated from an early date on backs and flanks of animals in Iranian and Egyptian examples, bearing additional symbolism. One from the royal kitchen at Mari dating from the second millennium has a fine rendition of an eight-bundled solar whorl placed centrally on a lion's back (V, 56).

Fig. V, 56.

Lion with solar shoulder whorl.  
Vollgraff-Roes (1953) p. 42. fig. 2.



<sup>239</sup> Earliest references: Attrib. Hesiod, *Precepts of Chiron*, fr. 3, trans. Evelyn-White (1936) pp. 74f. Herodotus, *History* II, 73.

<sup>240</sup> Suhr (1976) pp. 29ff.

The 'fiery' and undulating forms used in Near-Eastern rosettes or spirals, especially the eight-armed, evoke the heat and light of solar bodies and may for that reason bear reference to certain solar qualities associated with summer and fertility. The 'eight' may refer to the directions which, in meeting, identify the Centre.

### *Iconography of the bull*

**Fig. V, 57.**  
**Bull rhyton. c. 1600.**  
**Shaft grave IV, Mycenae.**  
**Athens Museum website.**



Such whorls and rosettes suggest a way of 'reading' a magnificent silver rhyton from the shaft graves at Mycenae (V, 57).

The central rosette could feasibly indicate the solar nature of the Mycenaean bull.<sup>241</sup> It is quite likely the mark of an animal prepared for sacrifice, in which case the animal is perhaps identified for his celestial destination. The gold work of the horns of the black bull recalls the dawn preparation on the shores of Pylos of "bulls who were all black", as witnessed by Telemachus and recounted in the third book of the *Odyssey* (4-6), where we also hear of the sacrifice to Athene of a cow whose horns are gold-plated on the orders of Nestor (3, 416-426). The creature is to be burned in (vertical) smoke offering to the deity, perhaps as a gift from a microcosmic centre below to the macrocosmic equivalent above.

**Fig. V, 58.**

**Mycenaean bull head rhyton**  
**from tomb at Karpathos.**  
**1300-1200.**  
**BM A971. Museum website.**



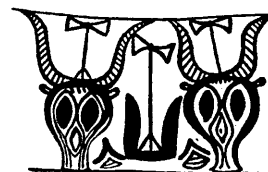
<sup>241</sup> Cook, *Zeus* 1, p. 523: in Egypt, gold disks on bulls' foreheads to represent the sun. Herodotus 2, 129ff.

On another bull rhyton (V, 58), a cross formation accompanied by flanking diagonal crosses (tripartite model) appears where the rosette was found in the earlier example. Such a design is possibly reflecting the meeting of four directions, in a symbol translating the same concept of 'centre'.

For the bull, the hair star or rosette would indicate the life force in the skull <sup>242</sup> or between the horns (*omphalos*-place) which is so often indicated by the graphic use of *bucrania*, especially when a vertical double axe rises between those horns. Evans observed that the horns in our figure V, 59, below, occupy the same position in relation to the axe as they do to the tree and pillar. <sup>243</sup> The axe is thereby confirmed by him as an object of worship in its own right, on the basis (I interpret) of 'iconic' positioning. The iconography equally implies that the between-horns *space* is a source-point of connection to the divine.

Fig. V, 59.

Double axe with 'Horns of Consecration'  
between bulls' heads with similar axes.  
Mycenaean vase. Old Salamis.  
Evans, *TPC* p. 107. fig. 3.



Given that the axe is occupying a place also accorded the tree, and that the tree is so often a marker of sacrality, one may consider both forms as executing a similar function. This I believe is 'connection to the divine,' in other words, an *axis mundi*.

\*

The foregoing observations rely upon an equation of 'bull and sun' in the world in question, particularly through identification of 'centre markers'. This needs amplification.

The capacity of cattle for reproduction, their mysterious power to fertilise the land, as well as their provision of meat, milk and hides, made the bull an object of intense

<sup>242</sup> Onians (1951) pp. 104-112.

<sup>243</sup> Evans, *TPC* p. 107. Cf. my figs. V, 19, 20, p. 42.

veneration to Neolithic stock breeders migrating across Asia. The resulting bull worship spread through Egypt, the Near and Middle East, and into India.<sup>244</sup>

Bull cult has been described by Michael Rice as a major and widespread practice in which the mighty animal is read as a manifestation of the divine.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, the bull has long been associated with rebirth and especially the spring. Rice reminds us that the constellation of Taurus marked the dawn of the spring equinox from 4,000 to 2,000 BC.<sup>246</sup>

Hymns to the Egyptian sun god Amen-Ra name him, *inter alia*, as “bull of the company of the gods”, “Bull of the Sunrise and Sunset” and “creator of the staff of life”.<sup>247</sup> Agni, Vishnu and Indra ‘are’ bulls, for in India the bull (*go* or *gau*) was celebrated as the equivalent of light (also *go* / *gau*), to be understood as spiritual light.<sup>248</sup> This places the bull and the cow amongst symbols that symbolise the flow of power from the upper to the lower plane, for sunlight falls from the skies in a straight shaft that could truly be a stairway to the gods. There is no difficulty in sharing that precious link, in metaphor, with the fertile and fertilising cattle. The *Vedas* celebrate a Cosmic Bull which is androgynous or bisexual, because he contains within himself (in his singularity, and like the cosmic egg, or unmanifest form of the One), the potential to create all other forms.<sup>249</sup> These are equally the all-embracing powers attributed to the *Skambha*, the cosmic pillar. Both represent primeval raw material.

In Crete, the sun as a bull (or bull as sun) would have been a celestial personification on a par with later representations of the sun as Apollo, dawn as Eos, or

<sup>244</sup> Primitive bull emblems appear from the third millennium onwards.

<sup>245</sup> Cf. Rice (1998) pp. 5f.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid. p.7. The relevance of this information is dependant upon the (uncertain) chronology of zodiac traditions.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. Conrad (1959) p. 83.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Joshi (1994) p. 3. Burkert (1962).

<sup>249</sup> Cf. Srinivasan (1978) pp. 208f., discusses the common identity of the axial pole, *skambha*, heaven-supporting *axis mundi* (cf. *Kalevala*, Sampo); and the cosmic bull as the progenitive power of the universe.



the moon as Selene.<sup>250</sup> From the same island comes the tradition of Talos, the bull-headed figure of bronze cast by Hephaistos to be a guardian for Crete, who reputedly ‘burnt up’ those approaching.<sup>251</sup> He has the attributes of a solar figure, and thus he was interpreted by early mythographers and more recent scholars.<sup>252</sup>

I suggest that a shared association of *fertility and the sun* (solar power as initiator of growth) slides easily into the association of *bull and the sun*, where the bull through his strength and procreative power becomes a paradigm not only of animal fertility but also of cosmic creativity. By way of the mutual association of bull and sun with the cosmic pillar, as well as an identification of the *ruler* with the bull,<sup>253</sup> with the sun, with the *djed* pillar, or with the god (as in Egypt); or the *god* with an animal such as the bull,<sup>254</sup> an accommodation is reached which makes the bull a solar creature *par excellence*.

255

(The *Odyssey* provides considerable evidence of the integration of sun and bull in the crucial episode of the Island of the Sun sacred to Helios, where the god keeps his cattle. We remember also the extensive application of roaring ‘bull-power’ to the warrior shield with *omphalos*-centre, and the ritual use of the oxhide in prayer).<sup>256</sup>

The Egyptian tradition of the solar bull may have had an influence on the Minoans.<sup>257</sup> In its docile stance, head up, the bull was associated in Egypt with “astral entities” which include the sun.<sup>258</sup> The sun is the ‘Bull of Re’ in Pyramid Texts. In hieroglyphic forms of the sun, the sun disk is prevalent in elaborate schemes, on its own, or between

<sup>250</sup> Parisinou (2005) p. 34f. note 35. Cf. Rice (1998) p. 103f.

<sup>251</sup> Gantz (1993) vol. I, pp. 364f. Simonides, *PMG* p. 568.

<sup>252</sup> Burrage (1921) p. 180, quotes Hesychius (no reference) “Talos is the Sun.” Talos was also known as *Tauros*, and Talos may be a variant of Kalos; cf. the Hittite sungod, Kal. Ibid. pp. 180, note 2; p. 181.

<sup>253</sup> Cf. Rice (1998) pp. 125f., 143. McEvilley (2002) p. 265f., bull and sacral kingship; bull as shamanic power animal.

<sup>254</sup> Cf. Rice, *ibid.* pp. 10f., 150.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid. pp. 54-60.

<sup>256</sup> III, pp. 57-59. Frame (1978) pp. 40-47.

<sup>257</sup> Wilkinson (1992) pp. 56f.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid. p. 57.

the horns of the bull.<sup>259</sup> Wilkinson<sup>260</sup> explains how symbolism of different forms with similar meanings operates through even small correspondences, but the 'sun-bull' must qualify as a major accommodation.

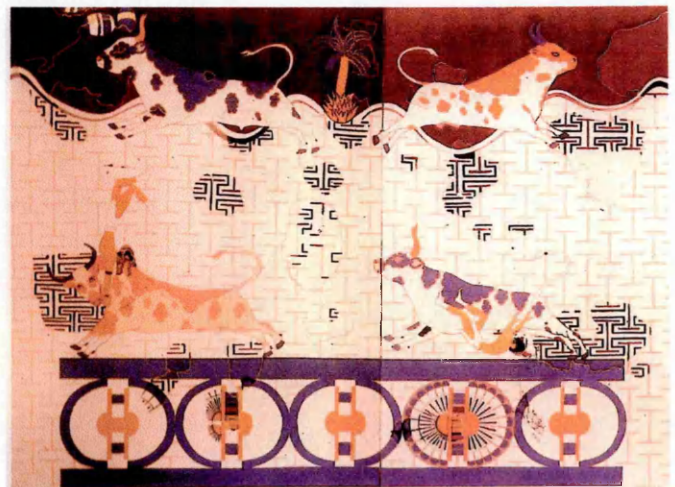
\*

A cosmic role for the bull may be implicit in the many depictions of the animal in Minoan art, and may even share an Egyptian tradition of the solar bull.

From Tell el-Dab'a (Avaris) in Egypt there survives a fresco fragment in Minoan style but predating known Cretan examples by a hundred years.<sup>261</sup> This shows a bull and bull leaper against a labyrinthine pattern (V, 60). It has been proposed that the scene is so lifelike that it would seem to portray actual events.<sup>262</sup> The wider landscape includes an undulating, double-line mountain range with at least one "sacred palm",<sup>263</sup> as well as the typical Knossian half-rosette frieze below. This is sufficient evidence for Bietak to suggest that the fresco is a true representation of the bull leaping ground at Knossos, perhaps in the West Court.<sup>264</sup>

**Fig. V, 60.**

**Bull and labyrinth, bull leaper, palm. Tell el-Dab'a. Reconstruction (by computer).  
Bietak (1996) plate 1V.**



<sup>259</sup> Ibid. p. 129.

<sup>260</sup> Wilkinson (1994) pp. 18f.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. Rice (1998) pp. 156-161.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. p. 156.

<sup>263</sup> Marinatos (1984a) pp. 115-122.

<sup>264</sup> Bietak (1996) p. 73f.

At a bare minimum, this representation indicates an essential connection between the three components, all evocative of the Theseus legend <sup>265</sup> in which the hero engaged with the (man-) bull, the Minotaur, in a labyrinthine setting. The sense of this grouping, whether in legend or image, needs teasing out.

Lyvia Morgan sees a “cognitive link” between Egyptian word signs, the Minoan maze, bull sports of the kind portrayed at Avaris and Knossos, and the Theseus legend.<sup>266</sup> Due to the late attestation of the myth, its relevance can only be speculative. But in view of the rare conjunction here of labyrinth, leaper and bull, mountain and possible ‘sacred’ tree, I adopt Morgan’s idea of associative ties and sketch a brief hypothesis which agrees with the myth as we have it.

Engagement with a superior force implies initiation; and the bull implies the force of nature in its regenerative aspect. A labyrinth speaks of quest, or journey towards a specific goal. The quest-struggle has its ideological elements (transition and initiation) and these may be played out in a symbolic, testing encounter with a chaotic force.

It can be imagined that the human contestant hoped to emerge from it victoriously, to a new personal status.

The association of these sundry elements with the palace of Knossos via bull (or Minotaur) would seem to confirm the latter as a place of initiatory ceremonies involving bull-leaping contests, among others.

**Fig. V, 61.**

**Bull’s head from relief fresco at Knossos,  
probably MM IIIB.  
Hood (1978) p. 72, fig. 55.**



Furthermore, the choice at Knossos of the bull as a power symbol, displayed “like a

<sup>265</sup> Gantz (1993) vol.1. pp. 262-270. p. 264: earliest report, scholiast on Pherykides 3F 148.

<sup>266</sup> Morgan (1995) p. 44.

heraldic emblem” in magnificent relief near the North Entrance (V, 61),<sup>267</sup> one of many imposing places so adorned at Knossos,<sup>268</sup> may well be the outcome of solar, fertility or power associations of the bull (or all three). This animal was in effect the leading image of Minoan authority in the Aegean world and the practice of bull leaping, a demonstration of élite skill and intelligence.<sup>269</sup> Therefore the bull of the North Entrance fresco at Knossos could be read as an assertion of political identity comparable with the Lion Gate of Mycenae: the monumentality of the piece, its placement close to the entrance, and the defensive aggression in the ‘lowered head’ stance of a ‘power animal’ offer suggestive parallels.<sup>270</sup>

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That the same images of power were seen as inherent or numinous in the figure-of-eight shield constructed of bull hides is acknowledged by Marinatos in her review of the use of hides in the Cretan and mainland palaces.<sup>271</sup> This idea is supported by the sharply accentuated use of hide colourations on the face of the shields, such as the distinctive shield of the leading (unfelled) warrior in the Lion Hunt dagger scene.

Fig. V, 62.

Dagger blade from Mycenae Shaft Grave IV.  
Perhaps Cretan work of LM IA. c. 1550-1500.  
NMA.  
Drawing, Castleden  
(1993) p. 27. fig. 10.



The use in glyptic and jewellery, however, of the eight-shield as a ‘decorative’ emblem, situates a prestige object among other sacred emblems in the context of religious ritual. The wider meaning and perhaps the root concept of the hide and shield

<sup>267</sup> Hallager and Hallager (1995) p. 554. Fragments of a stucco bull relief were also found near the north entrance of Avaris. Bietak (1996) p. 75.

<sup>268</sup> Placements listed by Hallager and Hallager (1995) pp. 547-549.

<sup>269</sup> Marinatos (1994) pp. 92f.

<sup>270</sup> Wilkinson (1992) p. 57.

<sup>271</sup> Marinatos (1999) pp. 481f. “hides... with emblematic significance”.

needs to be sought in the basic *nature and form* of the originating element (bull), as a key to *function*, with the value of the sacred animal carried over into the produced artefact (shield).<sup>272</sup>

### *Iconography of the octopus*

Fig. V, 63.

Octopus on vase fragment from Knossos.  
Throne Room. LM I, before c. 1450.  
Hood (1978) p. 143. fig. 136.



The octopus, it has already been suggested, was a preferred Minoan symbol of the Centre.<sup>273</sup> Its regular use on *larnakes* would therefore constitute a reference to renewed life, rather than an exclusive cult of the sea. Those examples in which an octopus or a similar form, the cuttlefish, merge with the sacred horns or the Tree of Life, are strengthening the power of the symbol by skilful layering of one upon another in a composite of symbolism and landscape, representing creatures from land, sea and air: the three planes.<sup>274</sup> The free-flowing Minoan marine motifs are prominent in the ceramic and fresco traditions,<sup>275</sup>

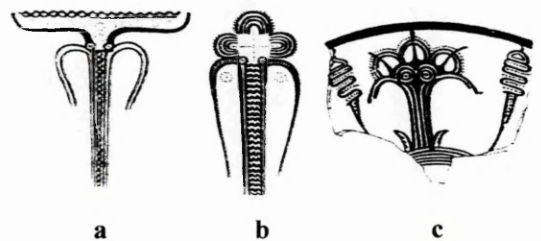


Fig. V, 64.

Evans, *PM IV*, 1.  
p. 312. figs. 240 a-c.

especially on *larnakes*, where they may be assumed to have a funerary role. In time

<sup>272</sup> C. Morris (1990) pp. 149-156.

<sup>273</sup> *IV*, p. 34.

<sup>274</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 234.

<sup>275</sup> Pinsent (1978) pp. 172f. records the octopus body stylised as a pillar. Wilson (1994) p. 38, fig. I, 28: octopus as a variant of the geometric spiral.

however the individual octopus figure converged with others in hybrid forms which Evans classified as “degenerate”,<sup>276</sup> but are recognised here as an artist’s striving towards multiple layering of power symbols (V, 64).

All three examples show traces of the cuttlefish, octopus’ eyes, pillar,<sup>277</sup> and tree or Tree of Life, rooted in the horns of the *omphalos* in the case of (c).<sup>278</sup> I believe this interplay demonstrates the fundamental ‘equivalence’ of the symbolic objects.

By the time that the octopus is appearing on the mainland as a Mycenaean motif, it has begun to converge with other axis imagery, partly in order, it would seem, to enable the figure to be adapted to the stems of *kraters* and pedestal goblets, where the slender stem-form and symbolic function, in a drinking / feasting context, further reinforce an ‘axial’ objective of fertility or renewal. If, as appeared from a reading of the landing of Odysseus on Scheria, the octopus acts as a marker of the convergence of four or eight directions at the World Centre, then the hybridisation, or syncretic process which identifies the octopus with a range of other symbols of the central power, is conforming to a need to multiply the talismanic force of major emblems through duplication.

### *Hybrid animal forms*

We have now seen a complex hybridisation of living creatures with plant life. Recognisable in figure V, 65 overleaf, the radiant energies of the weaving spider and the octopus (four legs with tentacles, four without) combine in a single image which may possibly be the Centre. This inference is reinforced by the incongruous (unless symbolic) cauldron-vessel, either fed by or supplying the hybrid through the elongated and unnatural head and abdomen, which continue the etiolated line of the body. The total amounts to an eight-legged sign of the Centre + *omphalos* + axis + fertile nature,

<sup>276</sup> Evans, *PMIV*, 1. pp. 310-314.

<sup>277</sup> Evans, *PMIV*, 1. p. 312, “octopus...attached itself to a kind of pillar”. Evans (*ibid.*) connects the latter with the central cult of Knossos.

<sup>278</sup> Cf. V, fig. 35, p. 61.



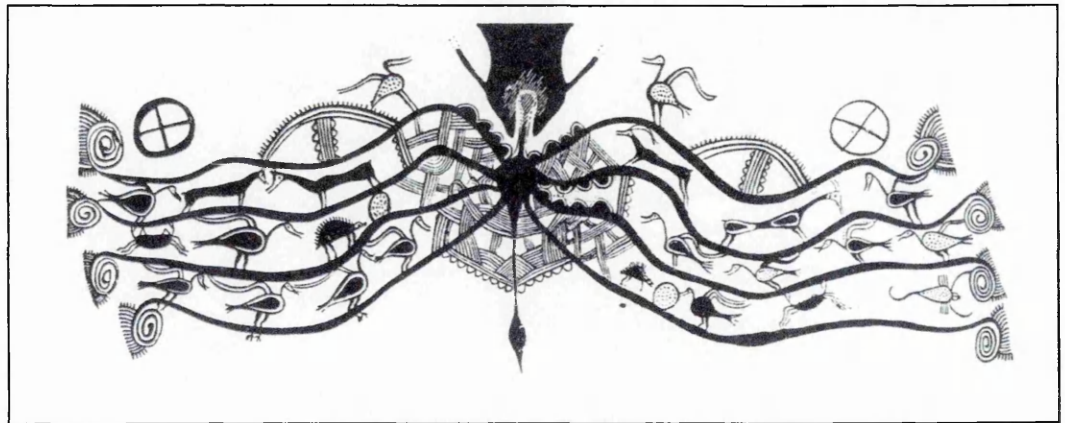
with two quadrated circles and two Tree of Life motifs reinforcing the process of expansion from the centre to the flanking positions.

Fig. V, 65.

Animal hybrid.

Design on false necked jar from Calymnos.

Goodison *DWS* fig. 137. BM. no. A 1015.



It is recognised that some iconographers have taken the view that hybridisation is no more than pictorialisation or decoration. Just such a functionalist view was held by Furumark whose work largely comprised a classification of surviving forms. Yet are we to assume that such figures as the above hybrid are solely the products of a desire to decorate? The piece is a playful *tour de force* integrating both well-observed natural forms *and* a meticulously worked fusion of spider and octopus. The degree of invention involved, and the variety of components, is in my view too forced to be other than ideologically determined. Particularly noteworthy is the incongruity of the jar element which bears no obvious relevance to the hybrid animal. Given that the jar conventionally stores food, and was sometimes used for burial, a certain symbolic value as 'renewal of life' might attach to this artefact, in which case we are seeing life forms emerging from, or sustained by, a symbolic omphaloid container.

### *The Ayia Triada Sarcophagus*

The iconography of the fourteenth century (LM IIIA) sarcophagus (V, 66), is an extraordinarily complex and challenging issue to which a few tentative remarks will be appended here as a contribution to debate.

Charlotte Long<sup>279</sup> argues that the fore-shortened, ‘armless’ and motionless figure standing before what is most likely his tomb in the presentation section of the scene on the north, front side of the sarcophagus, represents the body or spirit of the deceased who is partly embedded into the ground. The remembrance of Patroklos’ appearance to Achilles as the latter sleeps, in which “the spirit went underground, like vapour” (*Il.* 23, 100f.) suggests that here the man is either sinking into the earth or rising to witness his obsequies. Either of these actions, I suggest, would present an image of a soul in transition. The purpose of what is most probably a funerary rite would seem to be, says Long, “to speed the deceased ruler on his way”.<sup>280</sup>

**Fig. V, 66.**  
Ayia Triada  
sarcophagus.  
North side.  
Long (1974)  
plates 6, 15.



At one end on the north, ‘front’ side of the structure,<sup>281</sup> either the blood of the sacrificed bull or wine and water is being poured from a *krater* into a bucket which is

<sup>279</sup> C. Long (1974) p. 50.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.* p. 50.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.* Pouring Scene. Plates 6,15. Designated ‘Side A’ by Marinatos, *MR* pp. 31, 35.



placed between two mounted double axes, on 'leafy' obelisks or trunks evocative of trees, on which birds are perched. The presence of the birds and flanking arcs of the axe blades with the stepped solidity of the bases (*omphaloi*) convey the symbol of the cosmic axis, which is emphasised by the height of the artefacts. The bases are decorated with a rock-work pattern of coloured bands, in reference to the axial mountain and repeating the design on the side panels of the east end of the sarcophagus, that is, of the end which lay close to the tomb entrance. Such stuccoed and painted Neopalatial bases are attested at the Ayia Triada site.<sup>282</sup> The axe is therefore 'rooted' in the earth and 'reaches to the skies' with the bird motif. The receptacle between them is raised and appears to be allowing the wine (or other liquid) to seep into the ground below, in which case the rupture in the ground's surface constitutes an *omphalos* between the axial pillars (distinctly recalling Odysseus' pouring of the "drink offerings" into the pit / *omphalos* of the mouth of Hades, 11, 23-40). The liquid is not being applied to the axis-pillars, but the intervening space, which supports our view that the passage through them is the object of a sanctifying ritual.<sup>283</sup>

On the opposite face,<sup>284</sup> the siting of a sunken *rhyton* below the table of offerings with a trussed bull replicates a distinctly ritual function, judging by the number and decoration of such sunken pots to have been found close to significant points of architecture. The practice of libation at Minoan doorways is attested and would seem to be evidence of concerns with liminality in which 'inside' and 'outside' (sacred and profane space) were a major concern,<sup>285</sup> or even a desire to activate the power of the doorway or to invoke the doorway divinity. Libation appears equally to have been a feature close to altars, as at Tsountas House at Mycenae, where a drainage channel led from a low depression near the altar to a jar sunk in the floor. If 'infusion' were the sole

<sup>282</sup> Long, *ibid.* p. 35, fig. 38, plate 16. Nilsson, *MMR* pp. 217ff. fig. 111. A double axe base was also found in Mycenae.

<sup>283</sup> Harrison (1912) p. 162.

<sup>284</sup> Long, *ibid.* plates 30, 31.

<sup>285</sup> E.g. a part-buried pot with a broken base, set in a doorway at Mallia. Poursat (1966) p. 537, figs 8, 9.

focus of the activity, the pot would seem unnecessary; the pot as a token of regeneration however may be thought to reinforce the ritual purpose. At grave sites such as Archanes (a stone-lined *bothros*) and one of the Shaft Graves at Mycenae (a hollow ring of stones), provision had been made for the pouring of liquids into variously shaped containers.<sup>286</sup>

It has not, I believe, been noticed that the two axes constitute a portal or gateway. The artist has created a depth-perspective by allowing one axe pole to overlap the frame of the scene, which tells us, not that one is bigger than the other, but nearer to the viewer,<sup>287</sup> and that the two poles are set at right angles to the sense of the processions towards and away from the deceased. The gaze of this individual may be seen therefore as directed past the procession of offerings which is approaching him and focused upon the activity of the female ministrant at the axes. Should the two be thus connected, the implication is that 'the way to the gods' through the symbolic gateway has been activated by the ritual conducted there in the presence of the departed.<sup>288</sup>

Another interpretation of the 'split' scene on this north side, where the opposite-facing ritual actions are divided by a vertical line and a colour change (just visible in V, 66), is that the scene represents a 'centre' to be read in the occasional manner of Egyptian hieroglyphic sequence, from the centre outwards. This creates a link, as observed by Marinatos,<sup>289</sup> between the action of the adjoining short, east side with the long north side, via a goat-drawn chariot with goddesses, and the equivalent relationship between the (south) side (B) and the griffin chariot of the other short end. The implication here is that the griffin-borne goddesses have been invoked to enter the funerary scene from the east through the sanctified doorway, perhaps to act as

<sup>286</sup> Long, *ibid.* p. 63; p. 69: notes 34, 35, 36, 37.

<sup>287</sup> Size as an indicator of proximity to the viewer: J. W. Shaw (1978) pp. 429-448, 435 and fig. 9. Betancourt (1977) pp. 19-22, on BA use of perspective.

<sup>288</sup> Long cites the action of the bull sacrifice as a chthonic ritual, p. 67, on the basis of the flow of blood into the ground. The intention of the ritual was to secure a safe journey for the dead man to the Afterworld, p. 68.

<sup>289</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 35.

psychopomps to the deceased and to carry him up in the favourable direction.

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The ritual actions are taking place on the sarcophagus in close proximity to at least one 'flighted' chariot, and the calves or bull votives are in the 'flying gallop' style. The axes of the proposed 'doorway' are decorated with greenery, which suggests the (cosmic) tree in summer leaf, and they both support coloured birds. The tree close to the tomb edifice is identified by Long as an olive, and is solidly coloured. On the opposite, southern side however, the solitary axe pole is bare of greenery and bears a black bird, whose wings are folded, therefore with no hint of flight. There is a tree but it is confined within a building to the right. The implication is that access to life and renewal is identified with the summer season or the rising sun as shown in the principal and fronting scene on the north side, and that the journey of the soul (or preparations for the ceremony) are to begin in the south. The black and wintry features of the south flank intimate the presence of the sun in the northern hemisphere, the favourable half to those dwelling in the Mediterranean area.

The contrasting celestial and chthonic beings of the short ends are interpreted by Marinatos as moving towards the death and regeneration scenes of the long sides.<sup>290</sup> Certainly the bird above the winged griffins of one chariot emphasises the upward direction; the absence of imagery of flight at the opposite end with goats has possible chthonic significance. If both chariots are to be read as executing the psychopompic function, there is a reference here to the Two Paths of regeneration.

Given these indicators, and the inevitability that the corpse would lie in his rectangular sarcophagus aligned east-west in terms both of the decorative panels and the compass direction, one possible interpretation of the scheme is that the divine forces are operating at the invitation of the celebrants to bear the departed soul towards the east,

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<sup>290</sup> Marinatos, *MR* p. 35f.

the sun and the Centre in a form of spiritual flight. The opposition of dark / south, death and winter, with north / light, life and summer, accords with the directional pattern of regeneration which we have earlier found in several culturally diverse instances.<sup>291</sup>

The two chariots are clearly marked with 'hide' colourations, evocative of the bull which is suggested here as a solar animal. This is in some respect a chariot of the sun, one of the oldest and most widely distributed of symbols.<sup>292</sup> The wheels of the vehicles emphasise the cross-in-circle motif which is fundamental to early cosmological systems. The wheel is set four-square, with the spokes showing the vertical and horizontal axes. This is a 'soul vehicle' intended to transport the departed soul to his destination.<sup>293</sup>

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Some further conjectures arise from the 'doorway focus' apparent in this strong pictorial scheme. Architectural adaptations suggest an ideological function for the doorway at, among others, Anemospelia and Agia Triada itself.

A magnificent bull vase was found in the doorway of the west room in the shrine at **Anemospelia** near Archanes, a building possibly serving the needs of a peak sanctuary on Mount Juktas, to which it was connected by road. As the most visible peak in Crete, close to Knossos, it is a prime 'symbolic' mountain location in terms of ideology or power.<sup>294</sup>

The vase in question shows the animal walking "tranquilly" to sacrifice.<sup>295</sup> The design and function of this room (possibly even human sacrifice) speak of blood libation in close proximity to the doorway of a highly significant cult room on a mountain that has shown evidence of being the site of early cult activity (V, 67).

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<sup>291</sup> Marinatos, *MSR* p. 27, agrees: "a ritual of renewal...death, symbolised by the dead animal, and life, symbolised by the tree."

<sup>292</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Door* p. 24.

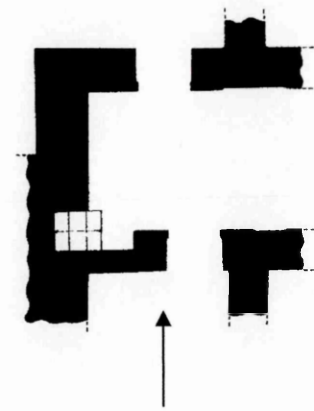
<sup>293</sup> Cf. *Il.* 24, 440-442. Hermes breathes great strength into the horses of Priam's chariot.

<sup>294</sup> Kyriakidis (2005) pp. 19f.

<sup>295</sup> Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis (1997) p. 561.

Fig. V, 67.

Anemospelia west room, opening  
onto north Corridor. Drainage pit  
in recess behind pillar.  
Sakellarakis and Sakellarakis (1997)  
vol. 1. p. 278, drawing 73.



West Room

With a drainage channel cut into the floor and threshold, this room was clearly designed for a specific ritual which allowed blood to flow around the pillar and into a (chthonic?) opening. The interpretation cannot be pressed too far (it may be no more than functional drainage), but it would appear that the doorway, and perhaps its pillar, were in some sense important to the rite.

In the necropolis area at **Ayia Triada**, rounded, baetylic stones, approximately sixty centimetres high, were discovered set in the west wall of a small room of MM IA dating. At about two metres apart, they were rather narrower than the tomb entrance (V, 68).

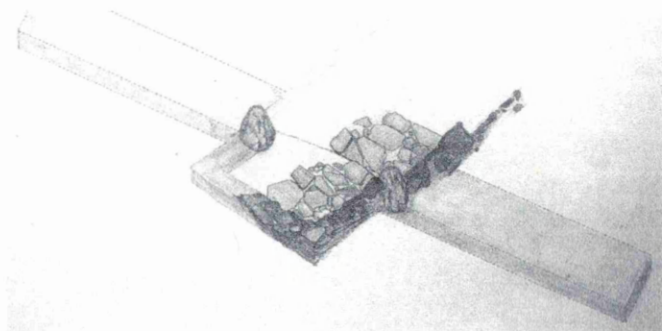


Fig. V, 68.

Ayia Triada doorway  
with baetyls.  
La Rosa (2001) p. 223.  
plate LXXIV, f.

A recent excavator<sup>296</sup> names them as symbolic of the jambs of a door, constituting a “threshold” between the two worlds. Here, relatives would gather to mourn and to pour libations, judging by the abundant quantities of small jugs and conical cups found in adjacent rooms. In such a context, the purpose of pouring at the gateway must be to facilitate the rebirth of the departed soul. There is no difficulty in equating a *baetyl* gateway with the double axe gateway of the sarcophagus, given the established interchangeability of single-referentiality forms, and to find in each, confirmation of the doorway as the route to rebirth in the Afterlife.

This encourages the categorisation of doorways as potentially sacral sites, in common with graves, altars, thrones and pillars, which all receive libations at various times and places; this feature is moreover, confirmed by the textual evidence of ‘power gateways’ in the *Odyssey*.

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<sup>296</sup> La Rosa (2001) fig LXXIVf. Cf. the use of two sets of paired monolith standing stones as doorways, linked by a processional way, in a funerary context on Neolithic Orkney, c. 3000BC. C. Richards (1996/7) pp. 190-208. p.199.

## ***Power and Authority***

### ***The Megaron***

The etymology of the Mycenaean palatial hall known to us as a megaron may derive from Semitic *megara*, 'cave', thus recalling cave cults on Crete and the mainland, albeit in architectural variations on the metaphor of inner place. The associations of cave and enclosed space, with womb and place of regeneration, seem to have been carried over into cult centres such as 'rock chambers,' as at Mycenae, where the living rock enclosed in a triangular alcove of a deposit room received sacral offerings. Such structures retain the values of the *omphalos* with enclosed pillar-axis.

Even more emphatically, the hearth at the centre of the Mycenaean megaron provides striking evidence of the adoption of axial symbolism into mainland culture from EH 1 or II.<sup>297</sup> Of great interest are those that have a central, decorated and fixed hearth<sup>298</sup> between four pillars such as those uncovered at Pylos, Tiryns and Mycenae, which date from LH III (e.g. Pylos, V, 70, overleaf).

### ***Symbolism of the Hearth***

The Mycenaean hearth may be an ancient antecedent of later associations of a goddess and a hearth which led to the cult of Hestia / Vesta. Kept in a dedicated building that was the symbol of the city,<sup>299</sup> the hearth of Hestia was to become one of the typical features of Hellenic civilisation. The megaron hearth of the ancient Mycenaean palaces with its four column layout corresponds closely to this later city hearth,<sup>300</sup> where Hestia's perpetual fire endowed her place with its chthonic powers and

<sup>297</sup> Caskey and Caskey (1960) p. 129.

<sup>298</sup> The hearth is, in many cultures, the central feature in the house or temple conceived as the microcosmic model of the universe. Gernet (1981) pp. 322-339. Lundquist (1993) pp. 12-16.

<sup>299</sup> The Prytany, possibly a circular, *tholos*-style building.

<sup>300</sup> Gernet (1981) p. 326. Farnell (1909) vol. V, pp. 350ff. Nagy (1990c) explores linguistic and symbolic links between fire, sun, hearth, Hestia and kingship in Indo-European tradition. His observations on 'kings generated from the hearth' pp. 173ff., give some point to Laertes' sleeping in the fire's ashes (11, 190f.).

acted as a focus of communal activity, especially feasting. It has been noted how the close associations between Hestia and Hermes, hearth-goddess and axis-god respectively, and smoke and the column, indicate that the two divinities may at some time have been the androgynous pair of the original creative source.

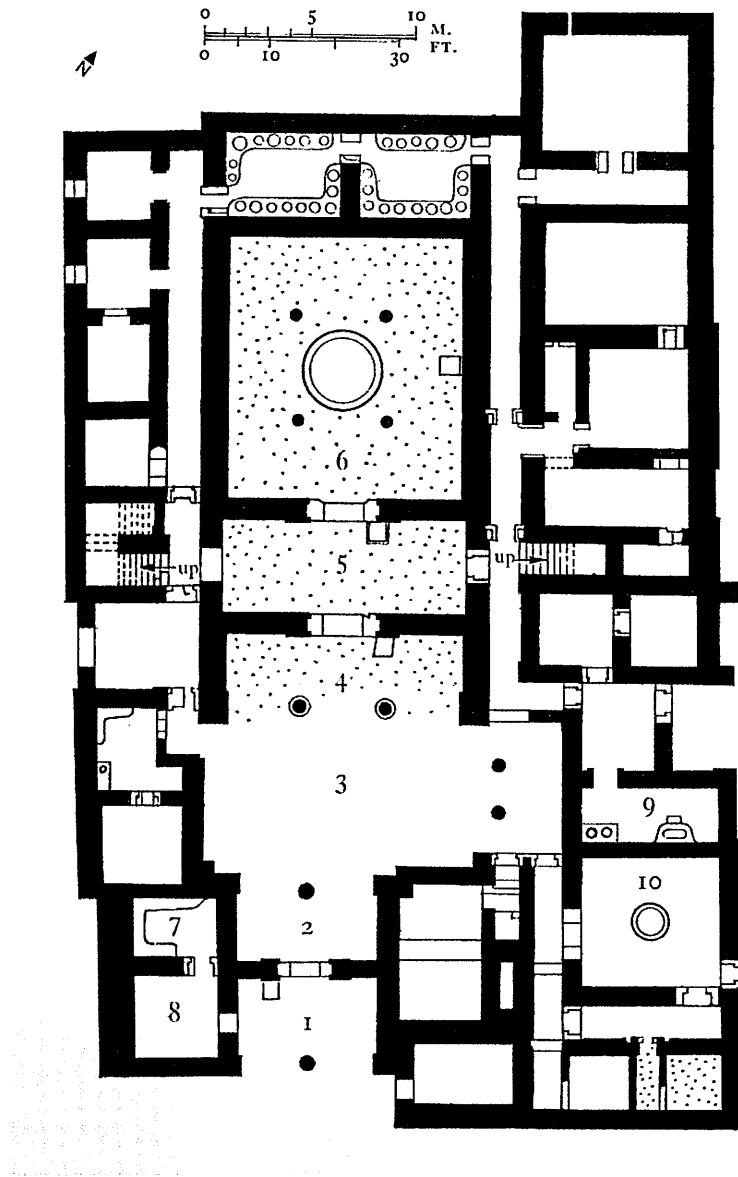


Fig. V, 69.

The palace at Pylos.

Hood (1978) p. 14.

6 = megaron, with central hearth, four pillars and throne, R.



*The Hearth as World Centre*

It has been noted by Olga Zolotnikova that the megaron hearth arrangement (V, 69) probably derived from the primitive dwelling place which placed its fire centrally in representation of the world centre,<sup>301</sup> in contradiction of practical necessity. (Burials under the hearth, of which she speaks,<sup>302</sup> were common in early society because, I would suggest, both the centre and fire represent transcendence and rebirth).

Zolotnikova recognises the significance of the four megaron pillars as “trees of life” or “world trees”.<sup>303</sup> She notes the quadrangular perimeter defined by the pillars, and the reference to the four cardinal directions.<sup>304</sup> I believe it possible to be more precise and to ascribe to the pillars a symbolic role as the four pillars of the world which uphold the dome of the sky. In conjunction with the round hearth, they ‘square the circle’, whilst simultaneously indicating the four directions.<sup>305</sup> As Zolotnikova notes, they symbolise the union of (Mother) Earth and (Father) Sky. The author’s strong sense of a female force inherent in the circular hearth,<sup>306</sup> accords fully with the proposition made in these pages that a female (a goddess or an epic mortal) often symbolises the columnar power or omphaloid fertility of the Centre. As pillared equivalents of the Tree of Life, she says, the columns hint at the underworld sphere and “the ‘absolute centre’ of existence”.<sup>307</sup> In the palatial megara they do not as far as we can tell uphold a sky-dome; nevertheless the escape of smoke through the central aperture above the hearth is emblematic of the axis rising through the ‘eye of heaven’ which is also the Sundoor of the house envisaged as the microcosmic image of the universe.<sup>308</sup> This smoke will be

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<sup>301</sup> Zolotnikova (2002) p. 124.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid. p. 125.

<sup>303</sup> Zolotnikova (2002) p. 127.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. p. 127.

<sup>305</sup> Cf. Parker Pearson and Richards (1994) p. 46.

<sup>306</sup> Zolotnikova (2002) p. 127.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid. p. 127.

<sup>308</sup> Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Eckstein* pp. 66-72, esp. p. 68, note 3. Cf. Coomaraswamy, *Door* pp. 192-241; p. 206, notes 24, 25: ritual transfixing of the head of the chthonic world-supporting serpent at the due centre of the house. An eight-petalled lotus is then set in the foundation stone.

the true axis, to which the four pillars are the centralising markers that define the sacred *temenos* around the hearth and axial smoke column.

The archaeological record yields further proof that the megaron was used as a major centre of cult. The destruction of the Tiryns megaron in LH III B or C led to the rebuilding of a new, slimmer model on top of the pre-existent one, but without the central hearth; even so, the places of the altar and throne were preserved.<sup>309</sup> This evidence of continuity may indicate either that a single person was still at that time the focus of activity in the megaron, or that the position of the throne (set on the cross axis of the hearth) corresponded directionally or ideologically to a cosmic reference point, or that both coincided.

The evidence of the Pylos Linear B tablets indicates that not only was the *wanax* involved in the celebration of rituals, he was the subject of those practices as a recipient of certain honours. That these amounted to some degree of deification is argued by J. C. Wright<sup>310</sup> on the grounds that the hearth of the palace was the symbol of the centre of the state. He finds the column as “a generic symbol”, “suggestive of the supernatural force”.<sup>311</sup> Spatial analyses of the throne rooms and megara further indicate that whatever cult practices were pursued there must have been for a social élite, as at the Cretan palaces, and that the *wanax* was largely isolated from the people. That his function was primarily religious is argued by Whittaker on the grounds that the Pylos Linear B tablets reveal no military ideology in the legitimation of the *wanax*.<sup>312</sup>

The latter could be expected to make use of such cult sanctuaries as that lying below the great megaron of Mycenae.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> Maran (2001) p. 119.

<sup>310</sup> J. C. Wright (1994) pp. 57f.; p. 59: “hearth-wanax-ideology” found in the prime symbol (the hearth), the Lion Gate, Grave Circle A, militaristic scenes and other “contradictory and disparate symbols”.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>312</sup> Whittaker (2001) p. 359.

<sup>313</sup> Maul (1996) footnote 39: spatially separate cosmic-religious and political centres throughout the 3<sup>rd</sup>. millennium in Mesopotamia.

That these sanctuaries were considered the 'residence of the deity'<sup>314</sup> or places where the deity was celebrated in cult, raises the question of the separate function of the megaron.<sup>315</sup> The scholarly consensus would seem to be that state cult<sup>316</sup> was performed at the heart of the citadel, as the residence of the ruler and seat of power of his administrative system. (As remarked earlier,<sup>317</sup> the later adoption of the megaron model for the public temple of the Greek state may be proof of its earlier cultic use).<sup>318</sup> If indeed the cult practised in the megaron were of greater importance than the rites of the cult centre itself,<sup>319</sup> we have a situation in which the *wanax*-king officiating at the ideological centre, at the sacred *omphalos* and axis-point, constitutes a human link more, or equally, significant than the worship of the god or gods *per se*. The situation of the megaron at a higher level than the cult centre, the social exclusivity of the building and the superior level of decoration all combine to suggest that whatever the power of the *wanax*, it was primary<sup>320</sup> and indicative of a strongly divinised form of kingship. I believe that power to have been defined and legitimised by the axial symbolism of the hearth, the throne, the pillars and the rites performed there.<sup>321</sup> The presence in the megaron of a seated female figure, as argued by Rehak,<sup>322</sup> does not I believe compromise this interpretation, for their roles could have been complementary.

There is one further indicator of a strong centralising symbol not addressed by Zolotnikova, namely in the so-far unexplained presence at Pylos<sup>323</sup> of the red octopus

<sup>314</sup> Whittaker (1997) p. 144.

<sup>315</sup> The 'cosmic city' can have more than one sacred centre. Cf. Dougherty (1980) p. 3: both temple/cult centre and palace may serve the same symbolic purpose.

<sup>316</sup> J. C. Wright (1994) p. 61.

<sup>317</sup> V, pp. 98f.

<sup>318</sup> Albers, *Potnia* p. 133. Nilsson, *MMR* p. 487f.

<sup>319</sup> J. C. Wright (1994) p. 61.

<sup>320</sup> Albers, *Potnia* pp. 136-139: the provision of large public areas (as at Knossos) in no way disproves a distinct and private cult around the 'king'.

<sup>321</sup> There is some evidence of pillar crypts, e.g. at Mycenae at the beginning of LH V, but shortly abandoned. Wace (1921/3) pp. 181-185, fig. 38, proximity of pillar crypt and megaron, and Plate XXXII, a; p. 186: Court, Pillar Basement, megaron, Room of the Throne, "hang together". The difference lies in the Mycenaean use of *fire* as the central axis, and the pillars as the four conceptual supports of the sky.

<sup>322</sup> Rehak (1995).

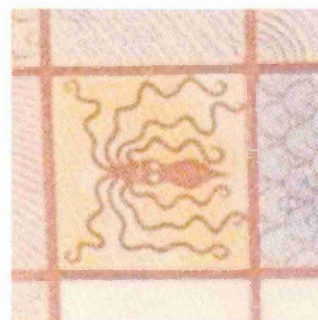
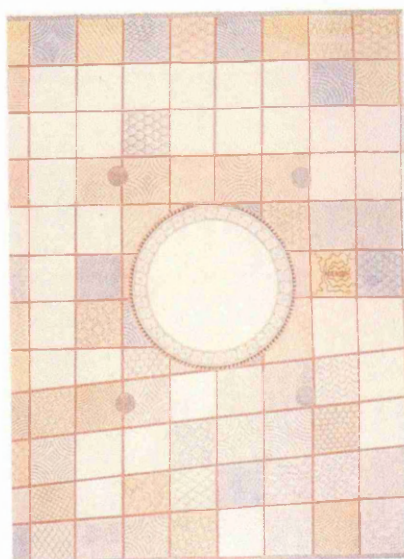
<sup>323</sup> Hirsch (1983) pp. 32, 46, sees a possible connection at Pylos between the throne area and the octopus facing it.

tile between the hearth and the throne with its libation channel,<sup>324</sup> the only pictorial tile in an abstract series in this important room.<sup>325</sup> It lies on the central axis of the throne and circular hearth, facing towards it. Its colour (red) expresses fire, sun and life, and its eight legs on a central body, the meeting point of the four cardinal and four solstitial directions.<sup>326</sup>

Fig. V, 70.

Floor of Pylos megaron,  
with octopus tile, detail.  
Preziosi and Hitchcock (1999).  
p. 157, fig. 97.

detail



The octopus would mark the conceptual Centre<sup>327</sup> as effectively as it marked Odysseus' arrival at Scheria where he was 'reborn'. It is possible to imagine- but sadly not possible to prove- that this single and differentiated tile marked the place of greatest significance that was accessible to the officiating figure outside the hearth itself,<sup>328</sup> a place where it was possible to stand in the surety that the spinal axis was absorbed in the line of force that passed at that point between the three vertical planes and the two

<sup>324</sup> Blegen and Rawson, *PN* vol. I, 1, p. 84. Vol. I, 2, plate 73. vol. II. Plate 148.

<sup>325</sup> An octopus, fish and dolphin series in corridor 49, leading from a side room to the megaron. Blegen. *PN* vol. II, plate 163. *PN* vol. I, 1, plates 61, 62.

<sup>326</sup> Some Tiryns octopuses raise their foremost legs in a 'double horn' pattern.

<sup>327</sup> Hirsch (1977) p. 46, "figural drawings...of an emblematic or iconographic nature".

<sup>328</sup> Hägg (1981) p. 36. The central hearth fulfilled "a strongly ceremonial function".

horizontal directions.<sup>329</sup> Thus located, any performance of ritual, and the officiant himself, would be validated and energised.

There are two hypothetical corollaries to these observations. The first is that the ‘officiant-priest’, who may have been the *wanax*, would have defined his authority in axial terms, just as the Assyrian king did, in identifying himself as gardener to his Tree of Life, and the Pharaoh in raising the *djed* pillar,<sup>330</sup> or naming himself as the bull. This provides us with some useful guidance on the priestly basis of kingship in Aegean culture.

The second inference must be that the widespread use of the octopus motif<sup>331</sup> on ceramic ware (particularly stirrup jars) was potentially far more than a pleasing marine motif. It would have marked the contents as emanating from an important World Centre. It was demonstrated by P.A. Mountjoy<sup>332</sup> that marine style vases, including those decorated with the octopus, were in LM1B deposited more frequently in ritual contexts than not. I am not sure that this is sufficient evidence as she claims for a specific cult of the sea, but certainly the awareness of the undersea as one of the earth’s planes and the start point of renewal is an essential part of a cult derived from the axis myth.

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<sup>329</sup> Cf. Eliade *SSA* p. 121. “The spinal cord is assimilated to the cosmic pillar”. Cf. Preziosi (1983) on human verticality in relation to the Tripartite Shrine. V, pp. 31f.

<sup>330</sup> Appendix 2, pp. 7-13.

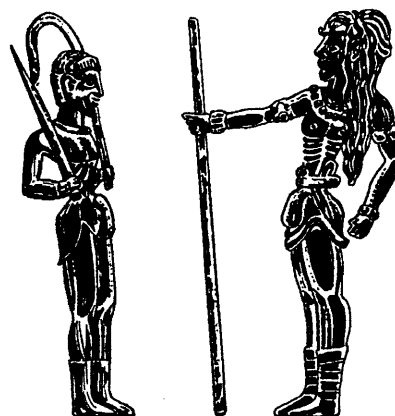
<sup>331</sup> Wilson (1994) pp. 27-49.

<sup>332</sup> Mountjoy (1985) pp. 231-242.

## Leadership

Fig. V, 71.

Two figures from the Chieftain Cup.  
steatite libation vessel from Ayia Triada.  
From two photographs,  
one centred on each figure.  
Castleden (1993) p. 166. fig. 56.



Homer allowed Agamemnon to assert the singularity of his unparalleled office on the basis of an axial symbol, a sceptre, which represented an authority passed from god to man. We have explored some of the axial connotations of this fragment from the tree on the mountain (“a thing of nature become a thing of culture”)<sup>333</sup> and note again the *singularity* of the artefact: “let there be one ruler, one king, to whom the son of devious-devising Kronos / gives the sceptre and right of judgment...” (*Il.* 2, 204-6).

‘Authority’ in linear form is illustrated in the scene from the Chieftain Cup where a staff or lance extends the status-gesture of command by a superior, identified by his dress (V, 71). Koehl has analysed the two figures as a young initiate (left as seen) and his mentor.<sup>334</sup> The older man with long hair would be granting gifts to his protégé on the occasion of the latter’s admission to the ranks of Minoan elite. The chalice offers important insights into social ranking in Minoan society, and confirms the existence of initiatory rites in this community.

But what did the sceptre *mean* to Minoans or Mycenaeans? *Skeptō*, “to press or lean upon” suggests a staff, perhaps the staff of an authorised messenger, whether

<sup>333</sup> Nagy (1979) p.180.

<sup>334</sup> Koehl (1986) p.106.

herald, king or priest.<sup>335</sup> Agamemnon's *skeptron* was inherited from Zeus, and Easterling advances the Homeric example as "*the sign, even of the actual locus, of religious power*".<sup>336</sup> She additionally quotes Clifford Geertz on those insignia which for the ruling élite "mark the center as center...connected with the way the world is built".<sup>337</sup> This is close to recognising the sceptre / staff as a miniature cosmic *axis*.

So, we must ask whether the Aegean iconography of the sceptre represents religious authority, or even cosmic reference, as implied by the later epic lines. Palaima argues for religious significance, the *wanax* in his view executing a priestly function.<sup>338</sup> One of his several arguments draws upon the *skeptron* as the attribute of a messenger, hence an intermediary between human or divine authorities.<sup>339</sup> Those hovering sceptre-bearing 'epiphany' figures discussed earlier could, I suggest, possibly confirm the transfer of divine legitimacy from 'a power above'.

The *skeptron* apart, it is difficult to identify authority figures. Rehak's investigation of seated figures in Aegean art found many "enthroned" females but no males, except in groups.<sup>340</sup> He came to view the Mycenaean megaron as a communal centre for feasting and drinking over which a seated woman presided.

It being difficult to differentiate the gender roles, the sceptre may be the more reliable way of tracing the transfer of authority.

Two remarkable Minoan sealings known respectively as the 'Master Impression' (V, 72) and the 'Mother of the Mountain' (V, 75) include a sceptre-bearing figure. Each contains sufficient iconographic material for the limited reconstruction of an interpretable dialogue. Whether they are 'companion pieces' in the sense that they can be read in conjunction, one as the consequence of the other, is open to doubt, but each

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<sup>335</sup> Easterling (1989) p.106f.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid. p.106.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid. p.107.

<sup>338</sup> Palaima (1995).

<sup>339</sup> Ibid. pp. 135ff.

<sup>340</sup> Rehak (1995) pp. 112f.

has a contribution to make. In both, the sceptre, staff or lance is again an element in the assertion of authority.

Fig. V, 72.

**'The Master Impression'**  
from LM IB destruction  
deposit, Khania.  
Hallager (1985) fig. 1.



'The Master Impression' found at Khania shows a figure of authority centred in a 'cosmised' sacred architecture of towers, horns, half-rosettes and monumental doorways. As he stands between horns of consecration, the 'Master' bodily extends the height of a tower bedded on a rock pillar rising from earth, sea or shoreline, in which pose he is at one with a 'sky-sustaining' column at the edge of the world. I believe it was to emphasise the important vertical reach of the combined man and pillar that the artist made the unusual choice of setting the scene upright along the length-axis of the seal.<sup>341</sup>

<sup>341</sup> Hallager (1985) p.16, and note 2.



In this conjecture, the staff would be a further repetition of the axial element, stressing his personal, divinised authority. The four cult items surrounding him would reiterate religious legitimization.<sup>342</sup> Krattenmaker outlines the importance of the compositional elements peak, palace and sceptre as symbolic, legitimising “trappings” confirming authority, but cannot be sure that this is man or divinity.<sup>343</sup> For my part, I find the combination of peak (height) and palace (depth) and the human figure with spear / sceptre all mutually expressive of the unifying cosmic axis, which *could* infer the sacralisation of a mortal.

An interpretation of this homologisation of man / god and mountain, or man / god and pillar, can possibly be read from a Mesopotamian cult item in the temple of Esagil, a ‘centre of the world’ and ‘home of the gods’ above the *apsu* (abyss), in ancient Babylon.<sup>344</sup> There stood a clay brick-lined pedestal, *parak simati*, ‘sociole of fate’; in Sumerian, *duku*, the ‘primeval hill’ of the world’s origin. As part of the New Year re-enactment of the victory of Marduk over the chaos-monster Tiamat, the statue of Marduk would be placed on this pillar. The current king would make a ritual atonement for his offences before mounting the pillar *to stand with the god* on the sacred hill. At that moment he became, says the Assyriologist Professor Maul, “the nucleus of all being, the pole of space and time”, as his power flowed with that of the god.<sup>345</sup> The king was then given the insignia of his power, symbolically from the hands of the gods. The assemblage of insignia beside the mountain and elevated man, as witnessed in the Master Impression, and the record of Assyrian cult practice, similarly indicate a desire to merge the man and the god.

From further Near Eastern evidence of similar, tripartite man-mountain figures, it can be seen that either the king (V, 73) or the deity of the mountain (V, 74, both

<sup>342</sup> Hallager (1985) p. 32. Krattenmaker (1995) p. 58: “a message...of legitimized rule”.

<sup>343</sup> Krattenmaker (1992) pp. 57f.

<sup>344</sup> Maul (1996) pp. 4f.

<sup>345</sup> Burkert (1996) p. 83: the vertical dimension interprets elevation of rank, and status.

identified as such by Keel) could be intended, but it is not easy to distinguish between them, since both refer to cosmic centrality. They stand as mountains below the winged sun disk, or between doorjambs or pillars, and in the second example (V, 74) as a central source of fertilising water, the four cardinal rivers.

**Fig. V, 73.**

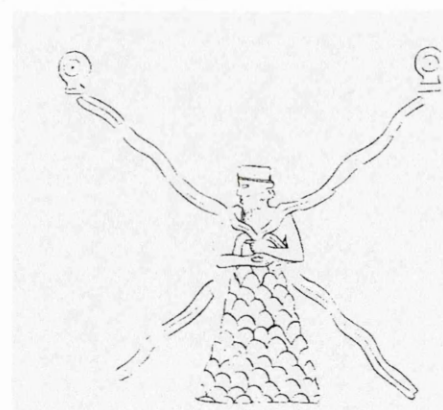
**Stone relief,  
Hittite king in close relationship  
with the cosmic mountain.  
1250-1220, from Yazilikaya.  
Keel (1978) p. 28. fig. 2.**



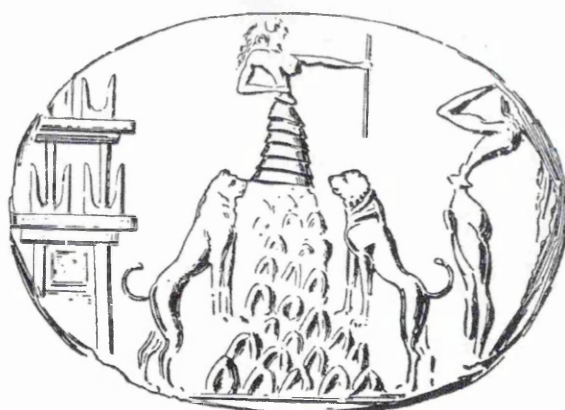
On balance, it would seem possible that ritual performances at some time (or times) put a leader into the central place of the deity, thereby deliberately fusing their roles. Artistic inventiveness would have found a way to create dual references to the god as a mortal, or a mortal as a god, in the same image.

**Fig. V, 74.**

**Ivory inlay. Mountain deity.  
Assur, New Palace, c. 1500.  
Berlin, Staatliche Museen.  
Keel (1978) p. 118. fig. 153a.**



The other Minoan sealing may help to draw out further possibilities.



**Fig. V, 75.**

**'Mother of the Mountain'.  
Seal impression from Knossos.  
Marinatos, *MR* p. 155. fig. 133.**

Here we see a female in the elevated, power role (V, 75). Like her male counterpart, and the Near Eastern examples, she stands triadically in the axial placement as defined this time by paired lions. She forms the central vertical that is bound by the containing figures of lions, palace and man. From the height, she passes- or exhibits- a staff or sceptre <sup>346</sup> to the male at her feet who must be of lesser status.<sup>347</sup> The substance of the transfer may be a gift, or a command, in the form of an exchange of authority, such as witnessed in the scene on the Chieftain Cup from Ayia Triada (V, 71). There is some kind of relationship implicit between the two, from which it can be inferred that the gift of the 'goddess' of the Centre, if such she be (her fertility implied in fullness of form?) amounts either to the elevation of the mortal to the status of divinely-sanctioned kingship, as seen in the Master Impression, or the gifting of fertility. The palace is by implication appointed her sacred abode. <sup>348</sup>

The combined evidence infers that either male or female, mortal or divine, or the mortal standing in place of the divine, could act as agents of transmission. The emphasis is perhaps not on the human agency but the informed, ritual act of community with axial power.

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<sup>346</sup> At a coronation in Erech, a 'Lady of the Sceptre' or 'Lady of the Crown' stood on a throne dais. Frankfort (1948) p. 245.

<sup>347</sup> Wilkinson (1994) pp. 63f., 44; relative placement and size as symbolic of status in Egyptian art.

<sup>348</sup> Rutkowski (1986) pp. 88f.

## ***Conclusion***

The exceptional sealings from Khania and Knossos which apparently depict the spiritual elevation of a ruler and an 'investiture' of mortal man by an immortal goddess, have provided a means of drawing to a conclusion an accommodation of epic and artefact which would not have been practicable without reference to that universal axial iconography common to both. A proportion of the special knowledge enjoyed in Crete and so elegantly illustrated in the great palaces such as Knossos, and repeated idiosyncratically on the Greek mainland, has been demonstrated to be markedly *cosmological*. During the *floruit* of Bronze Age society in the Aegean, a founding community and its offshoots and imitators created in wood, stone and paint, elegant and symbolic 'centres of the world', models of the creative heart of the universe to which such heroes as Odysseus journeyed and returned in solar-defined pilgrimages of spiritual transformation.

By embracing the extended metaphors and coded material of Homer's *Odyssey* the archaeological evidence has been supplemented with elements of belief preserved in oral tradition, and the value of the text as a partial record of the places, *realia* and ideology of the Bronze Age in the Aegean has been confirmed.

The historicity of the Homeric text consists not primarily (since inadequately) in identification of an attested artefact, but in something more profound and comprehensive; for in explaining and engaging with the outer world, traditional societies create and enact belief systems which leave their mark equally in the archaeological record, in their myths of creation, and in the adventures of their culture heroes.

***Appendix 1: Some iconographical comparanda***

***The Iconography of the Cosmic Axis and Omphalos  
Tables 1-3***

***2 - 7***

***Appendix 2: Some Case Studies in Axial Iconography***

***1 - 19***

*Shamanism*

*1*

*Vedic mysticism*

*5*

*Egypt: the Djed pillar*

*8*

*Sicily: Demeter and Persephone*

*15*

### ***Appendix 1: The iconography of the cosmic axis and omphalos.***

The symbolism of Homer and the iconography of the Bronze Age Aegean will be discussed in terms of the *axis mundi*, identified in earlier pages as a universal concept. To my knowledge, no comprehensive scholarly work on *axis* iconography has been published and for this reason information has had to be gathered piecemeal. Resumed in this section are leading features of the ideology as identified from extensive research, and some comments on identifying 'axial' references.

#### ***Processes***

- the concrete form (eg. column) is regularly used to imply the abstract idea (e.g. link to heaven);
- forms are interchangeable, polyvalent and often ambiguous;
- disparate forms can be identified via a common meaning or function;
- separate forms regularly merge into hybrids.

#### ***Characteristics of axis and omphalos***

- strength and stability
- spinning or turning
- penetration of the earth at the *omphalos*
- a central or peripheral placement
- location at the meeting place of two paths or rivers
- light or brilliance conveyed by stars, gemstones, or lustrous metals
- an androgynous, male, or female, identity
- sun, bird or star at the zenith, to indicate the heavenly apex
- water, or a water container, at the lowest point, indicating the nadir
- two 'flanking' items interpreting equal expansion from the centre
- fertility / prosperity
- possession legitimises a country, city, or leader.

Since the axis belongs to the supernatural order, its qualities are those of the monadic source. It is timeless, since eternal; singular, since unequalled; and of equivocal gender, since it is the source of all creation, 'potentiality'. It is equally omnipresent (place-less) by reason of its metaphysical substance (everywhere and nowhere). It communicates its own divine qualities: intelligence, fertility, wealth, knowledge, wisdom.

*The axis is typically*

- Symbolised in natural forms: **World Tree, Tree of Life, Cosmic Pillar, Sunbeam or Mountain.**
- Created as large artefacts substituting for the natural: a wooden **pole or pillar, stone column or high building.**
- Reproduced in smaller artefacts: the shaman's **drumstick**; the **staff, sceptre, lance or flagpole** of political and militaristic importance.
- Associated with **power, wealth and fertility,<sup>1</sup> life and regeneration.<sup>2</sup>**
- **Knowledge and wisdom.<sup>3</sup>**

*The Omphalos is typically*

- a point of **epiphany**
- the **navel-centre** of a cosmic being
- at the **meeting point of the four cardinal directions, and / or vertical projection**
- **timeless**: plant growth is abundant, unaffected by seasonal change
- imaged as a **navel, womb, castle, palace, cave or chasm, pot or jar**
- a **door** to the upper or underworld, or a **sky-gate.**

*Axis and omphalos appear singly, or in combination:*

The **tree,**<sup>4</sup> **pillar / column,**<sup>5</sup> the **post**<sup>6</sup> and **obelisk,**<sup>7</sup> are among the best known forms of the axis, whilst the **mountain** is commonly experienced as a route to the upper plane.

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<sup>1</sup> Eliade, *Patterns* pp. 239-262.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 265-330.

<sup>3</sup> Eliade (1959) pp. 148-151.

The **stone** may serve as a step to the heights.<sup>8</sup>

The burnt offering rises as a **smoke-pillar** from the *omphalos-altar*.<sup>9</sup>

The receptive and progenitive *omphalos* feature commonly appears as a **pot**,<sup>10</sup> **chasm** or **cave**,<sup>11</sup> or in biological terminology, as an **egg**, **seed**, or **uterus** of a **cosmic body**.<sup>12</sup>

It can have a **concave** or **convex** aspect, as at Delphi, with the **navel stone** and **chasm**, or at Mycenae with the *tholos tomb*.<sup>13</sup>

The **city** built on cosmic principles found its centre at the meeting point of the **four cardinal directions** with the **vertical**, where it locates the palace of its authority figures.<sup>14</sup>

The **labyrinth** identifies the symbolic **centre** of the directions,<sup>15</sup> as does the **swastika** and its derivatives.<sup>16</sup>

The **window**, **doorway** and **crossroads** are neutral, liminal spaces given mystic values.<sup>17</sup>

The **horizon** and the **rising** and **setting points of the sun** are similarly liminal and creative.<sup>18</sup> Solar aspects of the axis give rise to **doorway** symbolism<sup>19</sup> and **chariot**

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<sup>4</sup> Butterworth (1970) R. Cook (1974) M.C. Horowitz (1993) James (1966) A. Parpola (1994) S. Parpola (1993) Purce (1992) Widengren (1951). *C&G*, tree: pp. 1026-1033.

<sup>5</sup> Evans (1901) Guénon (2001) Holmberg (1922, 1927) M.C. Horowitz (1993) Irwin (1976) James (1966) Lechler (1937) S. Parpola (1993) Stone (1992) Wensinck (1921).

<sup>6</sup> Gunnell (200) Srinivasan (1978).

<sup>7</sup> Budge (2004).

<sup>8</sup> Smythe-Palmer (1899).

<sup>9</sup> Eliade, *Shamanism* p. 490. *C&G*, smoke: pp. 889f.; altar, p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> Birrell (1997).

<sup>11</sup> Bailey (1997) Brady and Ashmore (1999).

<sup>12</sup> Denisova (2001) Sjöö (1987) Srinivasan (1978) Wensinck (1916).

<sup>13</sup> Harrison (1912) Terrien (1970).

<sup>14</sup> Burrows (1935) Dougherty (1980) Duncan (1990) Friedel and Schele (1993) Klimkeit (1974) Kramrisch (1991) Mann (1993) Maul (1996) Meister (1990) Naydler (1996) Parker Pearson and Richards (1994) Perry (1991) Pocock (1975) C. Richards (1966/7) Richer (1994) Soles (1995) Terrien (1970) Wensinck (1916) Wheatley (1971) G. Wright (1970).

<sup>15</sup> Christinger (1975) Hooke (1935) Lonegren (2001) MacGillivray (2004a) Michell (1994).

<sup>16</sup> Guénon, *Cross*.

<sup>17</sup> Davidson (1993) Goldman (1966) Gottlieb (1981) Servier (1962) Waites (1919).

<sup>18</sup> Day and Wilson (2002) Nakassis (2004).

<sup>19</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Symplegades*.



symbolism.<sup>20</sup> In recognition of the heavens, rayed **light**, a **bird** or **star** surmounts the axis to indicate the zenith.<sup>21</sup>

At the nadir, a sea or land **creature** such as the turtle or tortoise may sustain the weight of the world axis.<sup>22</sup>

A **mountain** may represent the celestial bond.<sup>23</sup>

The two features come together in **magical or sacred buildings**<sup>24</sup> where the walled enclosure acts in part or whole as the *omphalos*, and where the **ziggurat, tower, steeple, pillar or post, door frames or rooftops** point to the celestial height.<sup>25</sup>

'Centralised' landscape plays a large part in determining settlement location.<sup>26</sup>

**Furnishings** of the house execute metaphorical functions, especially **thrones** or elaborate seating.<sup>27</sup>

**Agricultural** and other **craft machinery** interpret rotation within a container: grain mills.<sup>28</sup>

Items of **regalia** such as the **sceptre**,<sup>29</sup> recall the 'divine right' of leaders.

The **throne** and **altar**<sup>30</sup> are both omphaloid *foci* of ritual.

The **human body** is able to act as a microcosmic metaphor of the greater cosmos, with the spine translating the height and the energy points (*chakras*) located in containing centres such as the lungs and skull.<sup>31</sup>

Human **genealogies** constitute an axis or chain of being.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Gelling and Davidson (1969) Nagy (1973).

<sup>21</sup> Coomaraswamy ((1939a) Wensinck (1921).

<sup>22</sup> Allan (1991).

<sup>23</sup> Clifford (1972) Faure (1958) Huber (1999) Mabbett (1983) Scully (1979) Terrien (1970).

<sup>24</sup> Lethaby (1994) Mann (1993) Maul (1996) Naydler (1996) Wheatley (1971).

<sup>25</sup> Irwin (1976) Kramrisch (1991).

<sup>26</sup> Brady and Ashmore (1999).

<sup>27</sup> Gunnell (2001).

<sup>28</sup> De Santillana, von Dechend (1977).

<sup>29</sup> Palaima (1992) Perry (1991).

<sup>30</sup> Reusch (1958).

<sup>31</sup> Butterworth (1970) Fine (1995) Friedlander (1975) A. Green (1995) Guénon (*King*) Hardie (1983).

<sup>32</sup> Lyle (1992).

The **hearth** and its **fire** meet the criteria of ‘container plus vertical (smoke)’ thus constituting a sacred symbol.<sup>33</sup>

**Two Paths**, or double journey of the sun, reflect movement *in* or *out* or *around* the *omphalos* point, like the snakes of the **caduceus**.<sup>34</sup> Two animals, human twins, plants, or other antithetical objects which flank the axis symbol indicate expansion from the One into the many. The **Two Paths** may express the same phenomenon.

### ***Tables***

Table 1 profiles five major manifestations of the *axis mundi*, across a wide cultural spectrum: tree, mountain, giant, pillar or stone, and sceptre / staff. It is neither comprehensive nor time-specific, but has the merit of illustrating the wide geographical distribution and surprising consistency of the prime axial forms.

### ***Supplementary details***

These are available in the comprehensive symbol dictionary of **Chevalier and Gheerbrant** (1996). A description of the majority of the named principles and Categories can be found in Eliade’s *Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987) from which a selection is appended below. Volume numbers and page references are in brackets, alphabetical entries in bold, with some examples of featured items.

More specific references to Greek contexts will appear where relevant.

### ***Eliade (1987) Encyclopedia***

(Vol. I, pp. 382-392) **Architecture**: Ka’ba, *asherim*, Indian Temple, Dome of the Rock.

(Vol. II, pp. 20f.) **Axis mundi**: cosmic pillar, house pillar, three planes, palaces, ziggurat, cross.

<sup>33</sup> Gernet (1981) Nagy (1990c) Roussel (1911).

<sup>34</sup> Guénon, *Cross*.

(Vol. III, pp. 116-171) **Center of the World:** city, mandala, mountain, tree, bridge, ladder, temples, tombs, sound, mountains: Meru, K'un-lun, Himinborg, Gerizim, Tabor; cosmic tree, mystic body of man. **Circle. Comparative Religion.**

(Vol. IV, pp. 88-119) **Cosmic law, cosmogony, cosmology, crossroads.**

(Vol. XI, pp. 184-189) **Paradise:** island, mountain.

(Vol. XIV, pp. 49-53) **Stones:** pillars, baetyls, stone heaps. **Symbolism.**

With these criteria in mind, four case studies from a geographical area with known historical or cultural connections with the Aegean in the second and first millennia BC (Vedic India, Egypt and Sicily) are presented as illustrations of cosmic metaphor in the literature, iconography and cult practice of some early civilisations. I begin with an outline of shamanism, since shamanic features occur to some extent in all three cultures.

## Appendix 1. Tables

**Table 1.** *Summary of axis forms*

<i>culture</i>	<i>tree</i>	<i>mountain, hill</i>	<i>giant</i>	<i>pillar, stone</i>	<i>staff, sceptre</i>	<i>man</i>
Shamanic	Birch pole				drumstick	Shaman-healer
Egyptian	Sky tree	Primeval mound		Obelisk, <i>ben - ben, djed</i> pillar	<i>was</i>	Pharaoh
Babylonian	Kiskanu of Eridu	Hursag, Kur	Ninurta		Ningišzida's staff	
Phoenician	olive of Tyre	Saphon		ambrosial rocks		
Judaic	trees of Eden, Sephirotic (Kabbala) Jacob's ladder	Sion, Tabor, Sinai, <i>bimah</i> (reading desk)	Adam Qadmon	foundation stone, pillars of Sephirot (Kabbala), bethel stone	Moses' rod	<i>Zaddiq</i> , 'righteous man'
Christian	Cross of crucifixion	Golgotha	Christ		bishop's staff, banner of the Resurrection	Christ, Pope
N. European	Birch, fir			<i>Sampo</i>		
Arabic	<i>Tuba</i> tree	<i>Qaf</i>		<i>Ka'ba</i> , Dervish leader as 'pole'		
Classical	Athene's olive	Olympos, Parnassos	Atlas, Typhon	<i>Omphalos</i> , Delphi; <i>lapis niger</i> , Rome		
Germanic	Yggdrasill	Himinborg		Irminsul	Mjöllnir	
Celtic	oak	Hill of Uisnech, Pumlummon				
Indian, Buddhist	Asvattha, Jambu, Bodhi trees; <i>Soma</i> , lotus stalk	Meru, Sumeru, ant hill	Purusha	<i>Skhamba</i> , churning stick	Indra's <i>vajra</i> , Siva's trident	<i>Chakravartin</i> , universal monarch
Chinese	Kien-Mou tree	Kwen-lun	Pan-gu			<i>Wang</i> , Emperor
Japanese	tree			Pillar of house		
Mexican	Ceiba tree	Cuculcan		Huitzilopochtli's Xuihcoatl		

## Appendix 1. Tables

**Table 2.** *Summary of omphalos forms*

<i>Culture</i>	<i>Cosmic symbols: Star, bird, animal</i>	<i>Cup, chalice pot</i>	<i>Chasm, abyss, underworld</i>	<i>Palace, city, temple, door</i>	<i>Furniture, transport, building</i>	<i>Egg, seed, creative point</i>
<b>shamanic</b>	Pole star	drum		Tent, smoke hole		tree
<b>Egyptian</b>				Temple of Amun	throne	Primeval mound
<b>Phoenicia</b>	Eagle and serpent				throne	
<b>Babylonia</b>			<i>apsu</i>	Babylon		
<b>Judaic</b>	dove	Ark of Covenant	<i>tehom</i>		Altar throne	<i>Tiferet</i> (Kabbala)
<b>Christian</b>	dove	Skull, Grail, chalice	Hell	Montsalvat, (Magic castle) Jerusalem	'Siege perilous', <i>cathedra</i> , altar	
<b>N. European</b>	Pole Star, mill, horse	Cauldron pot			High seat on a pillar	
<b>Arabic</b>				<i>Ka'ba</i>		
<b>Classical</b>	Eagle, doves at Delphi	<i>pithos</i>	Tartaros, <i>mundus</i> , Hades	Olympos	Sky chariot	Wind egg
<b>Asian: Indian, Buddhist</b>	Garuda, tortoise	pot	anthill	Temple, <i>stupa</i>	Wheel centre, <i>eckstein</i>	<i>Gabb-harata</i> , <i>bindu</i> , <i>yon</i>
<b>Chinese</b>	turtle	jar		4-square city		Cosmic egg
<b>Japanese</b>	turtle					
<b>Mexican</b>	spider			<i>kiva</i>		

**Table 3. Cosmologies****Comparative cosmologies of the East Mediterranean.***Marinatos (2001) p. 395, table 1.*

The circular cosmos in Egyptian, Babylonian, Syro-Phoenician and Greek traditions.

These cultures also “share the duality of up and down, the antithesis between East and West, and the ambivalence of female deities”.

Egypt	Babylon	Syro/Phoenicia	Greece
Encircling waters	Encircling waters Cosmic river	?	Encircling waters (ocean)
Circular cosmos	Circular Cosmos	Circular Cosmos	Circular Cosmos
Females: Nut, Isis and Nephthys	Ishtar	Twin goddesses on bowl (Fig. 9)	Twin Goddesses Circe and Calypso
Cosmic Serpent: <i>Ouroboros</i>		Cosmic Serpent <i>Ouroboros</i>	?
God Shu upholds heaven	Hittite giant Upelluri bears the world in the Ullikummi myth. <sup>40</sup>		Atlas upholds heaven
	Gates of Underworld	?	Gates of Night (Parmenides)
Gates of Sun			Gates of Sun <i>Od.</i> 24.12.

## *Appendix 2: Some case studies in axial iconography*

### *Shamanism*

The roots of shamanism lie deep in the Palaeolithic past, in the age of nomadic peoples who followed the migrating herds in seasonal rhythm. It is particularly associated with North Asiatic races. Research among shamanist societies in Siberia and North America have revealed some of the leading traditions, some of which survive today.

The phenomenon loosely described as 'shamanism' centres on the ecstatic performance of the *šaman*, 'he who knows', one who claims the ability to travel between worlds. His travels empower him as sage and healer. Cosmological lore, trance states, symbolism of objects and animals, and ritual dramas all form part of shamanistic practice.

Man's place in the world order is shaped by the circular, diurnal rhythms of the **sun** which create the seasons conferring fertility on Mother Earth. Man too has his cycle; he is returned after death to the earth that nurtured him in order to live again. Within these circular patterns, points of change and transition are marked seasonally as the **four cardinal directions, equinoctial and solstice points**, as tokens of beginning and ending. These directions are horizontally defined but also exist in **vertical projection** as the rising and setting sun dictates.

This ideology is converted into a social system. At an early stage the 'front' of the Mongol's world was the east, though this later shifted to the south; in fact the Mongol viewpoint is from north to south. From this standpoint, the west (to the right) is named as the masculine direction, the east, on the left, the feminine. Society organised itself according to such basic dualities as direction and gender, in which the **central axis of north to south** was the primary point of reference.<sup>1</sup>

A major element in the stability of the wandering tribes was the **post** around which animal skins were hung to make the primitive *yurt* or *ger* (*hooghan* to the American

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<sup>1</sup> Eliade, *Shamanism*, pp. 120, 160, 224, *passim*.

Indian). This post was directed towards the **Pole Star**,<sup>2</sup> the one apparently unmoving star in the heavens, and the tent itself became the re-creation of the larger created world, a microcosm of the greater macrocosm, where man lived out his life in close imitation of the patterns of the universe as he experienced them.

In the Siberian tradition, the dome of the tent imitated the arch of the sky and all movement, and placement inside the dwelling referred to the symbolism of the sun's directions. The **north was the most sacred quarter**,<sup>3</sup> behind the central fire and opposite the tent doorway in the south. Elders and shamans sat in the north, which was also the place for the sacred objects. Other males occupied the western quarter, whilst women sat in the east, with their domestic utensils, and children shared the lower-status position to each side of the southern entrance. In this way every individual occupied a social space which was at the same time a temporal and cosmic space.

The sun that shines through the central roof opening will make a clockwise circuit of the interior in the course of the day, and this '**sunwise**' movement is observed in all human movement inside the tent, as it is equally in the outdoor dances and ritual. In this way the *ger* is the world, it is **the centre of the world**, and the fire in the heart of the shelter is at the meeting point of the four directions. The smoke that rises and disperses through the smoke hole will carry with it the community's offering to the gods, or on other occasions, will be the place where the shaman-priest will set up his birch tree **pole** for his ritual ascent to the heavens.

The shaman, or holy man, is chosen for his special gifts which focus on his ability to enter into trance and 'travel' between the **three planes of heaven, earth and underworld**. During these ecstatic flights he mediates with the powers of the upper and lower worlds on behalf of the souls of the sick or the dead. Guided by animal spirits with

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 254, 260ff., 266f.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 279.



whom he shares a close bond of understanding, he is enabled to make these journeys by his psychic gift which he calls his 'windhorse'.

The returning shaman's narration of his **Otherworld journeys** creates a storytelling paradigm: he goes, quite commonly, to the underworld to negotiate with the spirits for the healing of a sick person, or to seek news of the dead, and must report his experiences on behalf of his community. It is not possible to trace any direct connection, but the Asiatic shamanic religion, an ecstatic practice, includes **cosmological** details concerning the formation of the world and its three planes of heaven, earth and underworld which have left a lasting imprint in the anthropological record and in the development of sacred monuments.

### *Shamanism in Greece?*

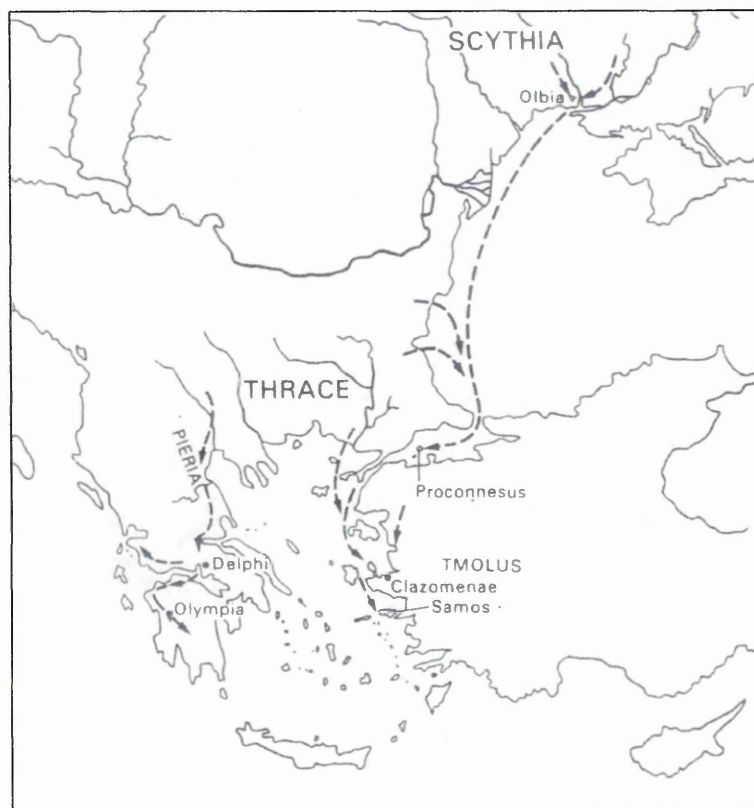


Fig. A2, 1.

Patterns of shamanistic influence in Bronze Age and Archaic Greece.  
West (1983) p.148, fig.2.

Shamanism is generally seen as a phenomenon of remote and under-developed communities. However, it is currently gaining some limited acceptance as a formative source of myth in developed cultures. Martin West, for example, is willing to consider the influence of shamanism on the Greek Orphic tradition. He holds shamanistic practice and ideology to have entered Greece from the steppes of the north, whence it influenced Greek myth.<sup>4</sup> The situation of the inspirational Hesiodic Muses on Mount Olympos, and their cult at Delphi, ‘the navel centre’ and point of access to the *krater* of the Underworld, are interpreted by him as shamanically inspired. Delphi as a cosmic mountain centre is described by West in the light of Eliade’s typology of the axis in his work on shamanism.

5

West does not dwell at length on the implications of the cosmic centre he identifies at Delphi, and we should proceed with equal caution. Shamanism, its nature, distribution, and its relevance to the development of Greek religion has been the subject of much debate. The universality of shamanist practice, and its formulation of an early cosmogonic system, make it an important start point for the investigation of Mediterranean cosmologies,<sup>6</sup> but it is in India and its early literature that the idea can be most easily traced as both ancient and ongoing.

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<sup>4</sup> West (1983) p. 146. Meuli (1935).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 146ff.

<sup>6</sup> McEvelley (2002) pp. 261-265: “residual shamanism”.

### *Vedic Mysticism in ancient India*

The birch tree pole which provided the shaman's 'ladder to heaven' <sup>7</sup> became, in India, the Vedic spear of Indra. The spear was equally the cosmic pillar, *Skhamba*, which pierces the primeval mound holding the waters of life and separates the heaven from earth. At the moment when the sun arose from the waters the four directions of space were formed. <sup>8</sup> Whether spear, pillar or pole, tree or sacred building, the 'prop of heaven' was to become a universal symbol of the flow of creative force and a pathway to the gods, endlessly reiterated in forms of ritual, building design, cult objects and the human spine, by which man is understood to be formulated in accord with the cosmic pattern.

An illustration (A2, 2) shows the essential elements of mound and waters and the emergent linear connection to the heavens, particularly the sun, which is the guarantor of life.

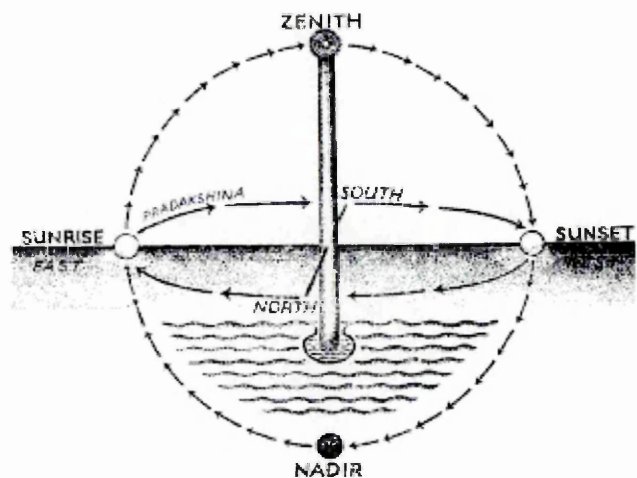


Fig. A2, 2.

The Cosmic Pillar founded in the Cosmic Ocean at the navel of the earth.  
Irwin (1976) p. 743, fig. D.

(In India the sun is imagined rising on the left, because the sun is the focus of interest, not the Pole Star. The viewer looks south).

Irwin, *ibid.* and p. 744, fig. E.

Sanskrit Vedic literature falls into a unique category, since its preservation was largely through memorisation and public recitation, even after the introduction of writing in

<sup>7</sup> Faulkner, *AEPT* p. 168: Utterance 480, §995. The Sungod makes a ladder for the pharaoh to ascend to heaven.

<sup>8</sup> Irwin (1990), 46f.

India. There was, it is suggested, “truth, in exact repetition”.<sup>9</sup> The great age of the *Vedas* and their potential link to the wider Indo-European culture render them apt for cross-cultural comparison.<sup>10</sup>

Divine revelation is claimed by the great Indian religious tradition for the hymns of the *Vedas*, whose mystic content of secret knowledge was interpreted in the later Upanishadic dialogues.<sup>11</sup> Since the work progressed through a specialised idiom of symbol and myth which was, moreover, cast in a ‘riddling’ format, the degree of understanding achieved among the audience must have varied considerably. The different levels of meaning reach their greatest complexity with the mystical or spiritual dimension, when they offer ‘vision’ to the spiritual seeker.

At the heart of the Vedic universe lies the great *Skambha*, the pillar topped by the Pole Star and holding up the sky as “a pillar, on sure ground where paths are parted”.<sup>12</sup> The pillar as a route to the world above can be traced through the history of the god, Pusan, whose nature and pattern of movement illustrate the **Two Paths**, a motif crucial to the understanding of Homer’s Underworld and Odysseus’ Adventures, as well as the complementary roles of Circe and Kalypso.

### *Pusan*

The Indian divinity merits comparison with the Greek Hermes, whom he much resembles.

The course of Pusan’s journey gives a model of movement along a solar axis. Although no clear relation of **Hermes** to the axis has to my knowledge been brought forward, a comparison with a Vedic god of very similar function shows how such psychopomps could fit into the cosmic pattern.

<sup>9</sup> Goody (1987) pp. 110-117.

<sup>10</sup> Nagy (1974).

<sup>11</sup> Kak (1999) p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *RV* x. v. 6 (ed.) Griffiths (2004) p. 532, note 6.

Pusan is “the one-legged goat”,<sup>13</sup> whose name has been linked to the etymology of Pan (the goat-footed son of Hermes) and the ‘Lord of the Way’ in the *Rg Veda*. Like Hermes he is a herdsman of cattle and guide of souls.<sup>14</sup> He glows like the sun, which he symbolises, and follows the solar path in the cycle of the year. Pusan’s path is the circular, solar one which descends to the darkness in midwinter, turns and rises again to its high point at midsummer before going about to repeat the pattern.<sup>15</sup>

“The Pit” and “the Peak” of his journey are “the parting of the ways”. The god is born first at the “peak”, in the north. He descends, and is born again in the south, six months later, at the solstice. He journeys back and forth between the two ‘births’ at each of the poles. In the north are the gods; in the south are the crossroads where Pusan confronts “the double-tongued” evil (*RV* I, XLII, 4), which is the pair of upward and downward, left and right hand paths. The ‘evil way’ is the downward (*RV* X, CXXXV, 2).

Here in the depths is rooted the **pillar of life** (*ayu*) on its foundations (*RV* X, V, 6). The ‘one with two faces’ (**Two Paths**) is crushed by the ‘one foot’ of Pusan, who swings a golden adze. (The Sun god is one-footed because his rays from the zenith constitute a single pillar). The vertical axis of Pusan’s cyclical path connects Pusan’s two poles of being. He is “the axis of the cosmos, pre-established as the upholder of its movement”.<sup>16</sup>

Pusan is the “son” of the twin Asvins, who, says Kramrisch, are “the archetypal and inseparable pair of contraries which keeps the world in perpetual tension”.<sup>17</sup> As personifications of polar opposites, the brothers are therefore variants of those **Two Paths** that find their place as ‘flanking objects’ in the iconography of the axis.

Hindu mythology still celebrates two brother-gods of the **east** (Mitra) and **west**, (Varuna). Agni, the sun, ‘is’ both west and east through his birth in the west, underworld

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<sup>13</sup> Dumont (1933).

<sup>14</sup> Kramrisch (1961) p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. pp. 106ff.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 108, note 16.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 116.

journey, and final easterly re-emergence; it is at the centre / zenith that he becomes 'another self', as Indra.

Could the Greek Hermes also be a god of the two ways or paths? He was after all instrumental in directing Odysseus 'home', to 'life', from Kalypso's cave and he guides Persephone *from* the Underworld,<sup>18</sup> yet he conventionally steers the dead towards Hades. There will be more to say about this central sustaining force and its two balancing paths in the fuller context of epic and iconography.

### ***Egypt: the djed pillar*** \*

The iconography of the Egyptian tree-pillar illustrates the complex interchange and layering of forms which are, ultimately, expressions of a single principle. They suggest a way of interpreting a similar process in another culture contemporary with the first.

The story of Isis and Osiris is told by Plutarch in the *Moralia*.<sup>19</sup> Osiris is the god of fertility who incurred the enmity of Typhon. Having already measured the god and prepared a chest for him, Typhon tricked Osiris into climbing into it. Once the chest was shut and sealed, it was thrown into the sea. Isis searched throughout the land for her brother, but the chest had washed ashore on Byblos and settled against a "heather" plant which gradually enclosed the chest. Such was the beauty of the grown plant that a king of that country cut it down and made of it a pillar as a support of the roof of his house. When she discovered where Osiris lay, Isis obtained the pillar and freed Osiris. But Typhon came to hear of it, and divided the body into parts which he scattered in different places.

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\* Bracketed figures, e.g. (S 40) refer to Gardiner's (1994) hieroglyphic system.

AEPT = Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Text.

<sup>18</sup> Gantz (1993) p. 111.

<sup>19</sup> Book V, 12-20.

This legend brings together the **body**, the **tree** and the **pillar**, and the dismemberment theme which is common to shamanism and many creation myths (e.g. Ymir, Purusa<sup>20</sup>). We shall now see how such disparate narrative images relate to iconographic schemes. At the heart of both media lies the axis concept.

A symbol known as the *djed* (variant, *tet*), can take several forms but was invariably sacred to the great god Osiris.<sup>21</sup> It is still not exactly clear what the *djed* was intended to represent, but its widespread ritual use in Ancient Egypt from the earliest recorded time establishes it as a premier symbol in Egyptian iconography.

The *djed* was raised ceremonially on the eve of the agricultural renewal brought about by the annual flooding of the Nile, which was followed by the planting of seeds (A2, 3). The image is strongly associated with the fertility of the land in the person of Osiris, who was the 'lord of the year' in the Pyramid texts.<sup>22</sup> The raising of the pillar was, mythically, the resurrection of the body of Osiris, and the guarantee of an abundant harvest.



Fig. A2, 3.

Seti I raising the *djed* pillar,  
Temple of Seti, nineteenth dynasty (1307- 1196).  
Wilkinson (1992) p. 164, ill. 4.

The forms and the variants of the *djed* show that an interlocking series of appropriate and conventional Categories could be at play at any one time in any particular example. The **column** and / or **pillar** are identifiable, but the **tree** reference is not far away, nor is the **spinal configuration** of vertebrae which invokes the human form of the god himself. The *incongruity* of the merged categories appears to be no

<sup>20</sup> Maclagan (1977) pp. 25f.

<sup>21</sup> Budge (2002) vol. A2, p. 913.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 347.

impediment: apparently meaning (or function) must have prevailed over realism (form). The legendary history of Osiris is resumed in markedly concrete imagery: his murder leads to enclosure in a chest and subsequent incorporation in the tree at Byblos, cut down to become a pillar of the royal house, whence power flows from him.

The same nexus of **tree-pillar-spine** can be traced in the series of pictures reproduced here (as figures A2, 4-6, from 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. Dynasty pyramid wall carvings, 2465-2150 BC), and selected utterances from the *Pyramid Texts* of Faulkner's collection.<sup>23</sup>

Fig. A2, 4.

Hieroglyphic *Djed* symbol,  
four vertebrae, on a stand.



Fig. A2, 5.

*Djed* pillar as Khnum,  
upholding the sky.



Figure A2, 4 shows the basic *djed* column (R 11). In figure A, 5, the god Khnum, in *djed* form, replaces Shu as the supporter of heaven. The same Khnum is referred to as “the raiser up of heaven upon its four pillars and supporter of the same in the firmament”,<sup>24</sup> or, on the walls of the temple of Esna, “the prop of heaven who hath spread out the same with his hands”.<sup>25</sup> In the Pyramid Texts<sup>26</sup> he is “one of the two pillars of the Great Mansion”. When Khnum makes a ladder for the king (“a star”) to ascend to the sky, the symbol employed is that for ‘ribs’.<sup>27</sup>

The *djed* has therefore a cosmic dimension. Its ritual elevation promotes fertility, but in its other associations, that same fertility is seen as the consequence of reconstructing the powerful link between heaven and earth.

<sup>23</sup> Faulkner (1969) henceforward *AEPT*.

<sup>24</sup> Budge (2004) vol. 2. p. 51.

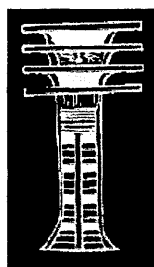
<sup>25</sup> Ibid. vol. 2. p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> *AEPT* Utterance 324, § 524.

<sup>27</sup> Gardiner's sign list F 43.



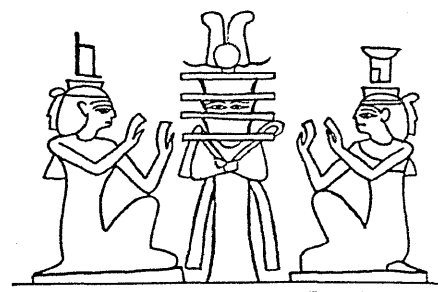
Fig. A2, 6.

*Djed*, elaborated form.

The association between the Osiris backbone and the column resulted in a merger of parts of the spinal vertebrae and a stand upon which they rested (A2, 4) to produce the later style seen above (A2, 6). The lower striations continue the spinal reference. In view of such an accommodation, it is unsurprising to note the partially or fully anthropomorphised versions which also occur. Figure A2, 7 reveals an anthropomorphic Osiris as the *djed*.

Fig. A2, 7.

'Osiriform' *djed*, Papyrus of Padmium.  
21<sup>st</sup>. dynasty, c.1070-945 .  
Wilkinson (1992) p. 164, ill. 2.



The mobility of such typifying images is demonstrated by two parallel scenes where the four papyrus stems (A2, 8) which frame the scene (Horus presents a flower to Osiris) are replaced by *djed* pillars (A2, 9) in a similar scene with Isis at the head of the bier instead of Horus.

Fig. A2, 8.

Horus presents Osiris with a flower.  
Four papyrus forms make a frame.  
Mariette (1981) vol. IV, p. 65.

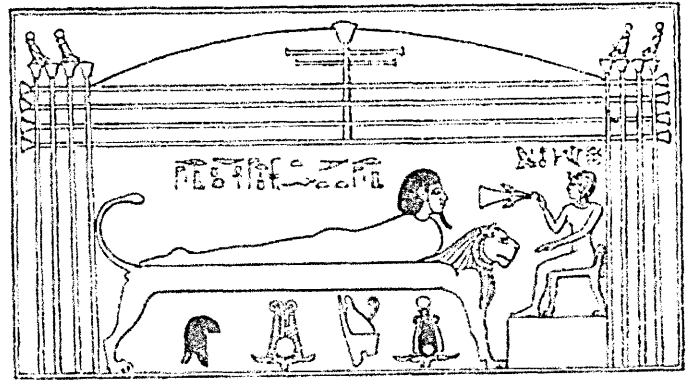
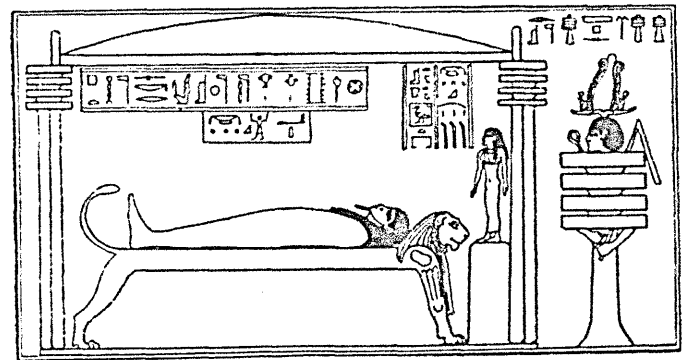


Fig. A2, 9.

Isis at the head of the bier of Osiris.  
Osiris-*djed* on right.  
Two (or four?) *djed* frames, each with  
four horizontals.  
Mariette (1981) vol. IV. p. 71.



We have reached the stage where papyrus, *djed* and backbone are demonstrably interchangeable, anomalous references to an *axis mundi*, for the *djed* in several of its manifestations is linked with the four directions of space, a phenomenon seen here as centring the tree-pillar-spine which upholds the heavens and regulates the seasonal cycle.

\*

A single papyrus stem, the *was* (S 40) may denote not only ‘youthful’<sup>28</sup> but a type of sceptre, or a pillar, a support, or column. Papyriform pillars commonly support the roofs of the Egyptian temple. Since a single papyrus stem (M13) bore an amuletic value as “green”, “youth”, or “flourish”, it was a symbol of life itself.<sup>29</sup> The *was* also functions as a support of the sky.<sup>30</sup>

The four cardinal directions are formulated in Egyptian iconography as the Four Sons of Horus, who are frequently found on the sides of sarcophagi.<sup>31</sup> The Four Sons are equally the supports of the sky, where the heavens sometimes rest on the four staffs that they bear.<sup>32</sup> This I suggest introduces the staff (or its close relative, the sceptre) into the complex of axial forms.

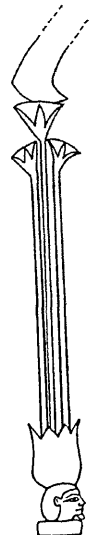
Fig. A2, 10.

Papyrus of Hunefer.  
Nineteenth Dynasty  
1307-1196.  
Four sons of Horus  
on single papyrus stem.  
Wilkinson (1992) p.136, ill. 3.



Fig. A2, 11.

Papyrus clump supporting the sky.  
Late Period (712-343).  
Detail, stele of Tentperet.  
Wilkinson (1992) pp.122f.



<sup>28</sup> Budge (1960) pp. 150f. ‘Youthful’ reflects the power of the ‘children of Horus’ to renew the king’s realm.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkinson (1992) p. 123. Ibid. pp. 180f. especially illustration 1, *Seti offering to Osiris*.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p. 181.

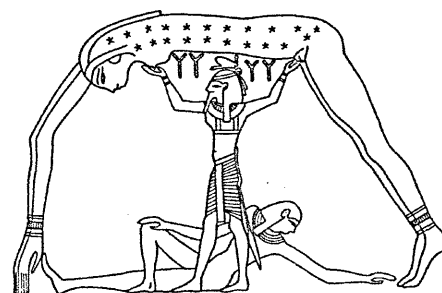
<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 142, ill. 2.

<sup>32</sup> *AEPT*, utterances 264, § 348. p. 74; 556, § 1385. p. 216; 573, § 1483. p. 228.

When the Four Sons are evoked in the resurrection of a dead king, they are shown associating with the rising sun “in the east of the sky”.<sup>33</sup> This is the point at which the *man-djed* overlaps with the sense ‘youthful’, for they facilitate the king’s return to life. In their rejuvenating capacity the Four Sons are shown gathered together on a single lotus flower (A2, 10), also a token of new life for its ability to arise and blossom out of the muddy depths. A late item (A2, 11) shows the single papyrus as a sky-support.

Fig. A2, 12.

Brandon (1963) p. 27. ill. A2I.



In (A2, 12) Shu, god of air, is seen raising Nut, the sky goddess, from the embrace of the earth god, Geb. The four Y-shaped symbols depict the four supports of heaven. The figures and the texts demonstrate the coming together of four contrary directions *at a single point* which represents the centre, or point of emanation.

\*

From this evidence, it can be seen how fertile and adaptable symbolic language could be when it came to dealing with abstract concepts. Whether or not Aegean iconography operated in the same way is impossible to determine in the absence of texts, so for the moment, we will note the flexibility and interplay between ‘imaged metaphors’ in this region, and the importance of one leading cosmic symbol.

<sup>33</sup> PT 507. AEPT p. 182, § 1104ff.

### *The Cult of Demeter in Sicily*

Concerning the cult in Sicily, Diodorus has Demeter travel from Crete to Attica and thence to his home island, where he locates the rape of Kore (Persephone). He is specific in naming the site of the maiden's disappearance:

"...the Rape of Kore, the myth relates, took place in the meadows of the territory of Enna which lies near the city, a place of striking beauty for its violets and every other flower and worthy of the goddess...And it is conceived of as the **centre of the island**, which is the reason why certain writers call it the **navel of Sikelia**. Near to it are sacred groves, surrounded by marshy flats and a huge grotto which contains a chasm which leads down into the earth and opens to the north...And the violets, we are told...continue to bloom, to one's amazement, throughout the entire year..."<sup>34</sup> (my emphasis).

- *centre and navel, chasm, timeless growth, north prioritised- as the sacred direction?*

The 'flowery meadow' motif is derived from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where not only violets, but crocus, hyacinth, iris, roses and lilies adorn the maidens' playground, where Persephone disports herself with "the deep-bosomed daughters of Ocean".<sup>35</sup> Seeing these flowers, particularly a marvellous, supernatural narcissus bearing a hundred blooms ("a thing of awe"), the daughter of Demeter "plucked them in [her] joy; but the earth parted beneath, and there the strong lord, host of many, sprang forth ...and bore [her] away".<sup>36</sup>

- *meadow and magical plant / tree motif*

<sup>34</sup> *Library of History*, 5. 2. 3-5; 5.1.

<sup>35</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 1-21.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 411-432.

The flowery meadow in association with an opening in the earth, may draw upon very early traditions concerning the nature and formation of the cosmos. Diodorus speaks again:

“The first island we shall speak about will be Sicily...which holds first place in respect of the great age of the myths concerning it...The Siceliotae who dwell in the island have received the tradition from their ancestors...that the island is sacred to Demeter and Core. That the ancient inhabitants of Sicily...were indigenous, is stated by the best authorities on this Island, and that it was the first, because of the fertility of the soil, to bring forth the fruit of the corn...”<sup>37</sup>

Sicily is indeed remarkably productive on account of the volcanic eruptions from Etna which have created such rich subsoil. The existence of a pre-Hellenic people as implied by Diodorus may be presumed likely, and that a local goddess was elected to protect the crops is also feasible. Therefore we ask to what extent Diodorus’ testimony is historically valid in its other details.

The antiquity of the cult in Sicily is reiterated by Cicero, who comments on the devotion to Ceres at Henna (modern Enna), finding it not only “quite astonishing”, but also “So ancient, so awe-inspiring...”<sup>38</sup> Among the crimes of the rapacious governor Gaius Verres, castigated by Cicero, was the theft of a bronze image of the goddess Ceres at Henna which was “very old- far the oldest...of all the treasures in the sanctuary”.<sup>39</sup> The great volcano Etna which lies only a few miles from Enna (and whose etymology would suggest a desire to draw the two into correspondence) was viewed as an entrance to the underworld, as were many another of the many chasms and underground rivers and springs in this highly volcanic island.<sup>40</sup>

- *central omphalos as chasm and entrance to the underworld*

<sup>37</sup> Library 5. 2. 3-5. 5.1.

<sup>38</sup> Verrine Orations, IV. xlv A2i.vv.107f.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. IV. chap. xlix. v. 109.

<sup>40</sup> Kingsley (1995) pp. 82f.; 97ff.; 353.

There is therefore some historical evidence for a cult of a grain goddess in Sicily which possibly predates the arrival of the Greek colonisers of the island in the eighth century. Was she older than the Demeter whose worship at Eleusis is the best known of the great mystery religions in honour of the mother and her daughter, Persephone? It has been argued that the Sicilian cult was an agricultural rite concerned with growth patterns, but without mystical purpose or reference to the Afterlife, as at Eleusis.<sup>41</sup> The simpler cult would be more likely to antedate the developed ideological form.

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Moving now from the historical record to the geographical dimension, we consider the location of the cult in Sicily, most specifically as named by Cicero, and as practised at Henna, modern Enna. Enna does indeed lie at the very centre of the island, and is still today referred to as the navel, or *umbilicus*, of the three-cornered mass of ancient 'Trinacia' in the island's travel literature. The relevance of landscape features to the development of particular cults is sufficiently well attested<sup>42</sup> that we can here confirm that the entrance to the Underworld (inherent in the myth of the rape of the maiden Persephone) has been identified with a place which bears several markers of a world centre, or meeting place of the three planes of existence. Enna not only lies at the island's centre point, but it is a mountain stronghold, on the highest habitable point of the island at 3,000 feet. The mountain is twin-peaked. This altitude assures a temperate climate where Diodorus' violets - or similar- may well have flourished.

- *centre, navel, three planes, mountain*

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<sup>41</sup> Martorana (1985) p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> Scully (1979) p. 6 *passim*.

It is possible to speak of a sacred or culturally sanctified landscape for Enna. Further examination confirms the existence in this location of some leading features of an *axis mundi* iconography, yet these are natural geographic features, which must have been awesome in the cosmo-mythic context. Just five miles from Enna lies the natural lake of Pergusa. This is slightly sulphurous, so healing properties may have attached to it in antiquity. It has, moreover, a periodic tendency to turn quite red when the sulphur causes certain bacteria to increase.<sup>43</sup> (Red is the colour of life and its reproduction, and for this reason has a mystical sense). The lake is naturally home to many waterbirds, whose annual migrations and returns were markers of seasonal transition.

Archaeological evidence from Pergusa has suggested that the cult there was indigenously Sicilian, older than the Greek cult brought later by settlers and merged with it, and associated with rites of female initiation.<sup>44</sup> Ovid, moreover, names Pergusa as the site of Persephone's abduction.<sup>45</sup> The development of a huge necropolis at Pergusa from the eighth to the sixth centuries indicates that the lake, as an underground entrance, could indeed have represented the Afterlife on the lower plane, whilst Enna, towering above on its mountain, pointed to the plane of heaven. What is more, the lake in its fiery setting near Etna and with its red waters, may have acted as a symbolic cauldron, or regenerative ocean.

- *mountain, lake, chasm, fertility, Afterlife, regeneration?*

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<sup>43</sup> Rigoglioso (2005) p. 6f.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. pp.16f.

<sup>45</sup> *Metamorphoses* 5. 365-678.



*Footnote*

It has been possible to trace a mythological element back to various attested cult places in Sicily, and from the combined literary and physical record in archaeology and surviving monuments, to confirm that landscape features were relevant to the structure of the myth and its localised celebration in cult.<sup>46</sup> By applying the ancient iconography of the *axis mundi* to the combined and comparative evidence, it is possible to explain, at least in part, the narrative of the myth, the purpose of the cult, and the significance of its location.

Here, then, is a tentative interpretation of the history of Demeter and Persephone in Sicily, as revealed by Diodorus and others. At the centre of the landscape rises a natural outcrop which reaches to the skies. Not far off lies a healing lake. The heavens and underworld connect, in mythological terms, at this central place via an opening in the earth's surface where the virgin maid is seized. The surrounding territories are fertile on account of the sacrality of the place where the land receives the divine power, and in that divinely-blessed country Demeter with her daughter represent the seasonal rhythms of summer and winter respectively. That rhythm is determined by the passage of the sun. The place is more than fertile, for it is endlessly productive of 'magical' flowers.

This last detail, which has implications for the suspension of time, more than any other links the 'navel place' of Sicily with the magic Isles of the Blessed, or the gardens of Alkinoos and Calypso, which are un-naturally productive, thus defying the seasons.

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<sup>46</sup> Cole (2004) p. 9f. Demeter ('agriculture') and Kore ('death') are complementary figures who bind the landscape, "in cosmic unity."

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### **Abbreviations: University Presses**

AUCP:	<i>American University in Cairo</i>
AUP:	<i>Associated</i>
BCP:	<i>Bristol Classical</i>
CalUP:	<i>California</i>
CUP:	<i>Cambridge</i>
ChUP:	<i>Chicago</i>
CoUP:	<i>Cornell</i>
FSUP:	<i>Florida State</i>
HUP:	<i>Harvard</i>
HuUP:	<i>Hutchinson</i>
IUP:	<i>Indiana</i>
JHUP:	<i>Johns Hopkins</i>
LSUP:	<i>Louisiana</i>
MUP:	<i>Manchester</i>
MelUP:	<i>Melbourne</i>
NYUP:	<i>New York</i>
OUP:	<i>Oxford</i>
PSUP:	<i>Penn State</i>
PUP:	<i>Princeton</i>
PUF:	<i>Presses Universitaires de France</i>
SUNYP:	<i>State University of New York</i>
SUP:	<i>Syracuse</i>
UAP:	<i>Athens</i>
UChP:	<i>Chicago</i>
UColP:	<i>Columbia</i>
UEP:	<i>Edinburgh</i>
UHP:	<i>Heraklion</i>
UIP:	<i>Illinois</i>
UIP:	<i>Innsbruck</i>
UMP:	<i>Michigan</i>

UNDP: *Notre Dame*  
 UTP: *Texas*  
 UUP: *Uppsala*  
 UWP: *Wisconsin*

### **Abbreviations: Primary and Secondary Texts**

*Some fuller references appear in Secondary Sources.*

*Some abbreviations of frequently cited authors appear after the author entry.*

*Antichità. Antichità Cretesi. Studi in Onore di Doro Levi.* (1973-4) vol. 1. Catania: Università di Catania.

*AEPT Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts.* Faulkner, Raymond (1969).

*BA Bronze Age*

*BMP Babylonia, Memphis, Persepolis.* Burkert, Walter (2004).

*C&G Chevalier, Jean and Gheerbrant, Alain* (1969, 1996) *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols.*

*CMS Corpus der Minoischen und Mykenischen Siegel. Fragen und Probleme der bronzezeitlichen ägäischen Glyptik* (1989). Berlin: Mann.

*DS A Dictionary of Symbols.* Cirlot, J. E. (1971, 2002)

*DWS Death, Women and the Sun.* Goodison, Lucy (1989).

*East The East Face of Helicon.* West, Martin (1997).

*Enc. Brit. Encyclopaedia Britannica. (Micropaedia)* (1979).

*Fontana The Secret Language of Symbols.* Fontana, David (2003).

*FS Fundamental Symbols. The Universal Language of Sacred Science.* Guénon, René (1998).

*Function The Function of the Minoan Palaces.* (eds.) Hägg, Robin; Marinatos, Nanno (1987).

*Heubeck. Commentary on Homer's Odyssey.* Alfred Heubeck et al. (rev.1988, 1989, 1992).

*KRS The Presocratic Philosophers: a critical history with a selection of texts.* (eds.) G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, M. Schofield (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed. 1983).

*LSJ A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th edition. (eds.) Liddell, H.G. and Scott, R. (1968) ed. and rev. by H. Stuart Jones. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

*Minoica Minoica. Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Johannes Sundwall.* (ed.) Grumach, Ernst (1958) Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

*MR Minoan Religion.* Marinatos, Nanno (1993).

*MSR Minoan Sacrificial Ritual.* Marinatos, Nanno (1986).

*MMR The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion.* Nilsson, Martin P. (1927, rev.1950).

*OCD Oxford Classical Dictionary.* (eds.) Hornblower, Simon and Spawforth, Antony. 3<sup>rd</sup>. edition (1996). Oxford: OUP.

*POC Palaces of Crete.* James Walter Graham (1987).

*PM The Palace of Minos.* Evans, Sir Arthur (1925-1935).

*PN The Palace of Nestor at Pylos in Western Messenia.* Blegen, Carl W.; Rawson, Marion; Lang, Mabel.

*RV Hymns of the Rgveda.* (trans.) Griffith, R.T. H. (1889,1987).

*TPC 'The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult and its Mediterranean Relations'.* Evans, (Sir) Arthur (1901).

### **Abbreviations: Journals and Schools**

Aegaeum: *Annales d'archéologie égéenne de l'Université de Liège*

Antiquity: *Antiquity: a Quarterly Review of Archaeology*

AA: *Archäologischer Anzeiger*

Äg u. Lev: *Ägypten und Levante*

AJA: *American Journal of Archaeology*

AJPh: *American Journal of Philology*

AJSemL: *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*

AR: *Archaeological Reports*

Arethusa: *Arethusa*

AM: *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Institut*

Art B: *Art Bulletin*

Art J: *Art Journal*

Astron Astrophys: *Astronomy and Astrophysics*

BAR: *British Archaeological Reports*

Bib. Arch: *The Biblical Archaeologist*

Boreas: *Boreas. Munsterische Beitrage zur Archaologie*

BSA: *Annual. British School at Athens*

BAOS: *Bulletin of the American Oriental Society*

BCH: *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique*

BICS: *Bulletin. Institute of Classical Studies. Supplements*

BMCR *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*

BSOS: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies*

BSOAS: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*

CJ: *Classical Journal*

CP: *Classical Philology*  
 CQ: *Classical Quarterly*  
 CR: *Classical Review*  
 Cosmos: *Journal of the Traditional Cosmological Society*  
 Exp Tim: *Expository Times*  
 Far East Q: *The Far Eastern Quarterly*  
 G&R: *Greece and Rome*  
 GRBS: *Greek, Roman, Byzantine Studies*  
 HSCPh: *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*  
 Hermes: *Hermes. Zeitschrift für Klassische Philologie*  
 Hesperia: *Hesperia. Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*  
 HR: *History of Religions*  
 JAOS: *Journal. American Oriental Society*  
 JHS: *Journal of Hellenic Studies*  
 JIES: *Journal of Indo-European Studies*  
 JMA: *Journal of Mediterranean Anthropology and Archaeology*  
 JNES: *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*  
 JIES: *Journal of Indo-European Studies*  
 JPR: *Journal of Prehistoric Religion*  
 JR: *Journal of Religion*  
 JRS: *Journal of Roman Studies*  
 Kadmos: *Kadmos. Zeitschrift, Fruhgriechische Epigraphik*  
 Latomus: *Latomus. Revue d'études latines*  
 Minos: *Revista di Filologia Egea*  
 MDAI: *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts*  
 Numen: *Numen. Studies in the History of Religions. Supplements*  
 OJA: *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*  
 PCPhS: *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*  
 RA: *Revue Archéologique*  
 RhM: *Rheinisches Museum fuer Philologie*  
 SIMA: *Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology*  
 SMEA: *Studi Miceni ed Egeo-Anatolici*  
 SO: *Symbolae Osloenses*  
 Speculum: *Speculum. Journal of Mediaeval Studies*  
 TAPhA: *Transactions of the American Philosophical Association*  
 VT: *Vetus Testamentum*  
 WA: *World Archaeology*  
 YCS: *Yale Classical Studies*  
 ZA: *Zeitschrift fuer Assyriologie*  
 ZAW: *Zeitschrift fuer die Altetamentliche Wissenschaft*

**Abbreviations: Aegaeum Series (alphabetically)**

***Eikon***: (1992) *Eikon: Aegean Bronze Age Iconography: shaping a methodology*. (eds.) Robert Laffineur and Janice L. Crowley. 4<sup>th</sup> International Aegean Conference. Liège. Université de Liège. *Aegaeum* 8.

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*Abbreviated:*

* BG	<i>Bhagavad Gita</i>
JUB	<i>Jaiminiya Upanishad B</i>
KaB	<i>Kauyitaki Brahmana</i>
* Mbh	<i>Mahabharata</i>
MU	<i>Maitri Upanishad</i>
* RV	<i>Rg Veda Samhita</i>

\* *Bhagavad Gita*. (trans.) Franklin Edgerton (1972) Cambridge Ma.: HUP. (BG)

\* *Mahabharata. Myths from the Mahabharata: Quest for Immortality*. Sadashiv A. Dange (1997) vol. 1. New Delhi: Aryan Books International. (Mbh)

\* *Rg Veda Samhita. The Hymns of the Rgveda*. (trans.) Ralph T. H. Griffith (1889, 1987) 2 vols. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Pubs. Pvt. Ltd. (RV)

*Holy Bible*. Revised Edition.

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PMG *Poetae Melici Graeci.* (trans.) D. L. Page (1962) Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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*The Old Ships*

*But I have seen,  
Pointing her shapely shadows from the dawn  
And image tumbled on a rose-swept bay,  
A drowsy ship of some yet older day;  
And, wonder's breath indrawn,  
Thought I - who knows - who knows - but in that same  
(Fished up beyond Æaea, patched up new  
- Stern painted brighter blue -)  
That talkative, bald-headed seaman came  
(Twelve patient comrades sweating at the oar)  
From Troy's doom-crimson shore,  
And with great lies about his wooden horse  
Set the crew laughing, and forgot his course.*

*It was so old a ship - who knows, who knows?  
- And yet so beautiful, I watched in vain  
To see the mast burst open with a rose,  
And the whole deck put on its leaves again.*

*James Elroy Flecker. Collected Poems, 1946.*